

A STORY OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Commentary on the Book of Hosea

by Paul G. Apple, March 2025

GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOYAL LOVE THROUGHOUT THE REPEATED CYCLES OF UNFAITHFULNESS, DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

Hosea 2:29 *“And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.
Then you will know the lord.”*

Hosea 14:4 *"I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely.
For My anger has turned away from them"*

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

GENERAL

Ray Stedman: Hosea: The Prophet and the Prostitute

Can you see in this beautiful story all the elements of the eternal triangle? There is the loving God, the faithless human heart, and the deceptive attractiveness of the world.

<http://www.discipleshiplibrary.com/pdfs/NET01040.pdf>

Robert Chisholm Jr.: Though Hosea's prophecy contains some calls to repentance, he did not expect a positive response. Judgment was inescapable. In implementing the curses, the Lord would cause the nation to experience infertility, military invasion, and exile. Several times Hosea emphasized the justice of God by indicating that His divine punishment fit the crimes perfectly.

However, the Lord would not abandon Israel totally. Despite its severity, each judgment was disciplinary and was intended to turn Israel back to God. Hosea's own reconciliation with his wayward wife illustrated Israel's ultimate restoration.

Gary Smith: The life of the prophet Hosea is special because people can identify with him and sense the joy and frustration of this living illustration of God's love. His tender and devastating experiences with his wife, Gomer, explicate the ins and outs of love in a more real way than a thousand definitions. He, like God, irrationally loved someone who was not very lovely (lit., "*a woman of prostitution*," **Hos. 1:2**), stayed committed to that love relationship in spite of great unfaithfulness by his covenant partner, and out of deep love forgave and took back a lover who betrayed him (**3:1–3**). . .

The message of Hosea should open the eyes of readers today not only to the awesome nature of God's love for us, but also to the terrible harm human sinfulness causes to anyone's personal relationship with God. Hosea helps us understand that unfaithfulness to a commitment to love God is like prostitution, not just a minor, insignificant slip that has no consequences. Some people think it is their personal right to express their faith in their own ways; thus, they neither keep their commitments to maintain a relationship with God nor follow his standards of justice and holiness. These are free choices, but they must be labeled acts of rebellion against the love and will of God. God looks at such acts as hypocritical deceit and theological lies—the kind of behavior that characterizes the life of an unfaithful spouse or prostitute. Coldness or an impersonal relationship with God is a sign that there is no love relationship with him.

G. Campbell Morgan: The result of the tragedy in his life was that he, Hosea, came to understand the heart of God, and what God suffered when His people sinned. He was admitted, through the mystery of his own tragedy, into an apprehension of what the sin of the nation meant against the heart of God. Hosea has been described as the prophet of the broken heart. The pain and agony of the man's heart is everywhere apparent, but it had become to him an interpretation of the agony of the heart of God. In his own experience he discovered what infidelity means to love;

and so, that the infidelity of Israel roused, not the wrath of God, though He was compelled by it to act in judgment, but the heart-break of God.

Dale Larsen: The prophecy of Hosea does not progress logically from beginning to conclusion. Its writing is **circular**, going back and forth between judgment and mercy. We get a sense of God arguing with himself about Israel—not that God has trouble deciding what to do, but he feels the pain of conflict between what he wants for Israel and what he must do because of their sin.

Hosea shares God's conflict when at God's command he marries—and stays married to—the immoral woman Gomer. It is the conflict of anyone who cares deeply about a wayward person. God condemns Israel's sin and knows Israel deserves to be written off; yet he hangs on, unwilling to give up on them. God eventually let Israel be defeated in the Assyrian conquest, but he did not ultimately abandon his people whom he loved. . .

Adultery and prostitution are the ugly pictures Hosea used to describe Israel's spiritual condition. The image of sexual immorality not only symbolized Israel's running after other gods and turning to other nations for protection, it also literally described their acts with temple prostitutes that were part of the fertility rites they had adopted. Hosea grieved over a nation once pledged to God but now unfaithful.

David Allan Hubbard: The prophet's experience accounts for the sharpness of his focus. Sins condemned by Amos – abuse of power, exploitation of the poor, presumption of covenant privileges – were prevalent. Hosea makes quick sallies into those territories. Yet he and Amos are as different from each other in emphasis as they are in experiences. The Baal-worship, over which Hosea wept, had dotted the hillsides of Israel while Amos was preaching but was little reflected in his messages. The prophets were not newspaper reporters required to write all sides of the story. Nor were they scholars preparing theses that investigated all angles of their topics. They were messengers, shaped by their calls, their experiences and their reception of Yahweh's word to speak to specific issues in specific ways.

Hosea's marriage, marked as it was by tragedy and recovery beyond the tragedy, both deepened his understanding of divine passion, and narrowed the scope of his message to the single point of Israel's relationship to the covenant Lord. It is that profound pathos, let loose towards Israel in speech after speech, irony after irony, metaphor after metaphor, question after question, which gives the book its fire. It is the fire of this passion and its message that confronts the reader with Israel's Lord.

The relationship signaled in that marriage was Hosea's dominant concern. He saw that relationship inaugurated by Yahweh's grace in Israel's distant past. Jacob, the patriarch, was not always a grateful recipient of it (**ch. 12**). Israel, the people, tasted it in the Exodus (**2:15; 13:4**), the wilderness (**2:15; 9:10**) and the settlement in the land (**2:15**). That grace viewed Israel as special to Yahweh, cared for by him and commissioned to serve him.

Hosea also saw the relationship jeopardized from the beginning by Israel's forgetfulness. Like a geography teacher Hosea took his hearers from place to place reminding them of their penchant

to tax the relationship by their fickleness: ‘*Baal-peor – here you first dallied with Baal*’ (9:10); ‘*Gilgal – here you crowned Saul king and compromised Yahweh’s sovereignty*’ (9:15); ‘*Bethel – here you desecrated Yahweh’s name and Jacob’s memory with the golden calf*’ (10:5–6); ‘*Gibeah – here your unbridled lust stained your history book with the gruesome tale of gang-rape*’ (9:9; 10:9–10).

Despite that sordid past, Hosea saw in his own times the relationship sunk to its lowest point in Israel’s unrepentant history. The cult of the Baals, the instability of the monarchy and the naivety of foreign policies were its three chief expressions. Hosea’s accusations were laced with metaphors that exposed Israel’s rebellion: stubborn calf (4:16), loaf half-baked, yet mouldy (7:8–9), silly dove (7:11), baby too stupid to be born (13:13). And his announcements of judgment were conveyed in pictures of appropriate ferocity: God would be a lion, a leopard, a she-bear (13:7–8).

So sorry was the present that the near future could mean only a relationship severed by invasion and exile. Military intervention, with all the brutality for which the Assyrians were famous, and removal from the land, with all the pain of dislocation and deprivation – these were the necessary means of purging the nation.

Yet in the face of all of this, Hosea has a clear picture of the covenant relationship restored at Israel’s return to Yahweh. Five times in the flow of the book, this reconciliation is intimated (1:10 – 2:1; 2:14–23; 3:1–5; 11:8–11; 14:1–7), conveying the overall intent of the book: the persistent presence of Yahweh’s love despite his people’s endemic waywardness. A new marriage awaits Israel in God’s time and on God’s terms. Because Hosea knew this, he had the courage to rebuild the relationship that Gomer had shattered, and to demonstrate both the reality and the cost of such reconciliation.

AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The lack of biographical data within the text forces us to hypothesize about the origin and occupation of this prophet of God. From the numerous geographical notations in the book (4:15; 5:1; 6:8; 9:15; 10:5, 8, 15; 12:11; 14:5-8), it has been assumed that Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom. The subject matter of Hosea’s illustrations has prompted commentators to suggest that he was either a baker (7:4), a peasant farmer (8:7; 10:13), a priest (5:1), or a son of the prophets (1:2; 4:5; 9:7-8). To reconstruct the character of the prophet from the text would be impossible except that between the lines Hosea reveals his deep-seated love for his brethren. It is significant that rabbinic tradition, perhaps because it noted the unique involvement that Hosea had with his subject matter, classified Hosea as the greatest among his prophetic contemporaries.

John MacArthur: The title is derived from the main character and author of the book. The meaning of his name, “*salvation*,” is the same as that of Joshua (cf. **Num. 13:8, 16**) and Jesus (**Matt. 1:21**). Hosea is the first of the 12 Minor Prophets. “Minor” refers to the brevity of the prophecies, as compared to the length of the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Hosea began his ministry to Israel (also called Ephraim, after its largest tribe) during the final days of Jeroboam II, under whose guidance Israel was enjoying both political peace and material prosperity as well as moral corruption and spiritual bankruptcy. Upon Jeroboam II's death (753 B.C.), however, anarchy prevailed and Israel declined rapidly. Until her overthrow by Assyria 20 years later, 4 of Israel's 6 kings were assassinated by their successors. Prophesying during the days surrounding the fall of Samaria, Hosea focuses on Israel's moral waywardness (cf. the book of Amos) and her breach of the covenantal relationship with the Lord, announcing that judgment was imminent.

Circumstances were not much better in the southern kingdom. Usurping the priestly function, Uzziah had been struck with leprosy (**2 Chr. 26:16–21**); Jotham condoned idolatrous practices, opening the way for Ahaz to encourage Baal worship (**2 Chr. 27:1 – 28:4**). Hezekiah's revival served only to slow Judah's acceleration toward a fate similar to that of her northern sister. Weak kings on both sides of the border repeatedly sought out alliances with their heathen neighbors (**7:11**; cf. **2 Kin. 15:19; 16:7**) rather than seeking the Lord's help.

Gary Smith: Hosea's ministry in Israel came shortly after the preaching of Amos in Israel (765–760 B.C.) and partially overlapped with Micah's and Isaiah's ministries in Judah. Although the superscription of the book of Hosea lists only one Israelite king, Jeroboam II, the parallel list of Judean kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah) demonstrates that Hosea preached during the reign of several kings after Jeroboam II died. This information allows us to posit a ministry extending from about 755 during the final years of Jeroboam II until around 722 B.C., just before the fall of Samaria and the exile of the people of Israel (**2 Kings 17:1–6**). . .

These were difficult political times to be involved in any kind of prophetic ministry. The nation was literally falling apart before Hosea's eyes, and the ruling class did not have the political leaders to provide a stable government. Most people who heard Hosea preach probably did not think his religious analysis of their political problems was a credible evaluation of the nation's situation; thus, most did not turn from their evil ways. . .

Lloyd Ogilvie: Hosea and his contemporary Amos were active in the middle of the eighth century B.C. Although Amos was from Judah, both spoke primarily to the northern kingdom, Israel. A few years later Isaiah and Micah would address the southern kingdom, Judah, with a similar message.

Amos probably began his ministry a few years before Hosea and completed his prophecy within the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel. Hosea began his prophecy in the last years of that king and continued into the turbulent years leading up to the collapse of the northern kingdom. His ministry apparently ended some years before the destruction of Israel's capital, Samaria, in 722 B.C.

Homer Heater: We know virtually nothing about Hosea beyond the fact that he was the son of Beerī, that he was married to a woman of questionable repute, and that three children were born to her. The biographical data in chapters two and three is designed to teach about Israel, therefore, little more can be learned about Hosea from that section. . . Whether he is a priest as were other prophets (e.g., Jeremiah) is not stated. Hosea is a later contemporary of Amos. The

only northern king mentioned is Jeroboam II. The last southern king listed is Hezekiah who ruled from 728 to 687. This would mean that Hosea lived far beyond the fall of Samaria in 722 and no doubt spent his later years in Judah.

Eric J. Tully: The first verse of the book tells us that Hosea's ministry took place during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel (**1:1**). King Uzziah reigned from 792– BC, and Hezekiah reigned from –686 BC. Based on this range, and (such as the instability in Israel due to the assassinations of Israelite kings), we can tentatively date Hosea to 755–725 BC, the mid-late eight century BC. Hosea is the only classical, writing prophet in the Old Testament who was a native of the Northern Kingdom.² Amos was also a prophet to the Northern Kingdom, but he was a native of the southern Kingdom of Judah. All of the other prophets were from Judah and ministered there.

At the beginning of Hosea's ministry, during the reign of Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom was politically stable and economically prosperous. Because it was divided from Judah, however, the Israelites were not able to obey God by worshipping and making sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam I, the first king of the Northern Kingdom, had attempted to resolve this problem by creating worship sites at the extreme north of his nation (at Dan) and at the extreme south (at Bethel). He set up calf-idols at these sites in order to represent the gods who delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt (see **1Kgs 12:28–33**). This was a systemic sin for the northern kingdom since God did not recognize these sites as legitimate alternatives to the temple in Jerusalem because they involved syncretism and idolatry.

In addition, the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom had a significant political and economic relationship with Phoenicia, a nation to the north along the Mediterranean coast. Along with trade goods, they imported Phoenician culture and religion, including the most important fertility deity in the region—a Canaanite god called Baal. Baal is mentioned seven times in the book of Hosea.³ He was thought to have power over lightning, storms, and rain, and therefore could make the land fertile and the crops grow. For subsistence farmers whose entire livelihood depended upon what they could produce on the land, there was a powerful temptation to worship Baal in order to ensure a successful harvest. By serving Baal and other fertility deities, the Israelites attempted to control nature to gain security and wealth for themselves.

The LORD, however, had promised Israel fertility, security, and wealth as blessings resulting from his covenant with them, as well as terrible punishments if they broke his covenant and disobeyed (see **Lev 26** and **Deut 28**). Therefore, the book of Hosea represents a kind of contest between deities. Who will give Israel what she desires? One possible choice is the LORD, the creator of heaven and earth and Israel's covenant partner. A second choice is the fertility deities of the surrounding nations. The people of Israel chose the fertility deities (or tried to add the fertility deities to their worship of the LORD), breaking their exclusive covenant with the LORD and bringing his judgment upon them.

In the latter part of Hosea's ministry, the Northern Kingdom was politically unstable and threatened by the militaries of neighboring nations as well as Assyria, the superpower in the east. Following Jeroboam II, there was a series of kings with short reigns because they kept assassinating each other. Zechariah reigned only six months before he was killed by Shallum.

Shallum reigned one month before he was killed by Menahem. After ten years, Pekahiah came to the throne and was then killed by Pekah, who was in turn killed by Hoshea, the last king of Israel. In 722 BC, just a few years after Hosea's ministry, the Assyrians came and defeated Israel. They destroyed the capital city of Samaria, exiled the population to Assyria, and brought in captives from other nations to inhabit the land. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was no more. Some from Israel, however, escaped to Judah and lived there. Hosea looks forward to God's restoration of his people—Israel and Judah—in the eschatological future when he reconciles them to himself and gives them the fertility and wealth that they had desired so fervently.

Leon Wood: By this time there had been peace for many years, and with it had come economic prosperity. The land was again producing abundantly (**2 Chron 26:10**), and many people were becoming wealthy. Luxuries had once more become common. Building activity was flourishing on every hand (**Hos 8:14**), and this led to a widespread feeling of pride (**Amos 3:15; 5:11; Isa 9:10**). Though people are pleased with conditions of this kind, seldom does prosperity lead to behavior that pleases God. This was true at this time in Israel. Social and moral conditions developed that were wrong and degrading. Side by side with wealth, extreme poverty existed. Through dishonest gain and false balances, the strong took advantage of the weak (**Hos 12:7; Isa 5:8; Amos 8:5-6**). Those who had wealth felt free to oppress the orphans and widows, and even to buy and sell the destitute on the public markets (**Amos 8:4, 8**). Justice seemed at a premium, and the courts apparently did little to help.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Religious Background

Syncretism characterized the religious order of the day. The worship of the Canaanite god Baal diluted Israel's worship of Yahweh to a great extent. Baal, meaning "lord" or "husband," was the name commonly given to the Canaanite storm god, Hadad. He was often represented as a bull, the symbol of fertility. The bull images built by Jeroboam I at Dan and Bethel (**1 Kin. 12:28–33**) no doubt provided another occasion for assimilating the worship of Yahweh to the worship of Baal.

Canaanite religion, like most in the ancient world, connected gods and goddesses with **forces in the natural world** and considered that their course could be influenced by the devotion and rituals of worshipers. Religion then takes on a **magical quality** as an attempt to manipulate the gods, which is characteristic of perverted religion in any place and time. Rituals aim to ensure the foundations for life, such as the rain necessary for crops in Palestine and the success of animal and human reproduction.

Along with this was the view that **sexual relations between gods and goddesses** were responsible for some of the initial and continuing processes in nature. Based on this idea and a concept of imitative magic, **sacred prostitution** was a prominent part of the cult. Worshipers would engage in sexual intercourse with cult prostitutes at the shrines, hoping to influence the gods to do likewise and thus ensure continuing fertility.

Religious devotion was hardly lacking in this age. The question was the quality of that devotion. Certainly the acts of Yahweh were celebrated in the cult, but too often these were taken as a sign of unconditional support for the status quo. The covenant obligations were either blurred or understood as completely fulfilled by the rituals (**Amos 5:21–24**).

H. D. Beeby: Instead of one God the Canaanites had more like seventy gods. Once El had been the supreme deity, but a celestial palace revolution had replaced El by Baal, and for Hosea Baal symbolized all that was erroneous and corrupt. Most likely the word ba'al originally meant "the one who fructifies"—the one capable of making the other fertile. The husband, the bull, and perhaps the rain were therefore ba'als. The power to fructify carried with it authority, and therefore the word had come to mean "the one with authority," or "lord" or "master." Myths about fertility, used to foster fertility, inevitably engendered cultic techniques which gave prominence to sexual acts designed to operate with the powers of imitative magic. Male and female prostitutes thronged the shrines, making sanctuaries indistinguishable from brothels and holiness indistinguishable from harlotry. The faith of Hosea's fathers had become so debased that in almost every respect it was now the opposite of the great original. So Hosea is called to state the case for the prosecution and eventually to ascend the bench and don the black cap.

LITERARY STYLE:

A. T. Pierson: This book is rhythmical; its language metaphorical and laconic. The nation was rotten with private vices and public crimes: lying and perjury, drunkenness and lust, robbery, murder, treason, and regicide. The worship of Jehovah was corrupted with idolatry and profaned by formality. Situated midway between Egypt and Assyria, two factions existed; one favoring alliance with Egypt, the other, with Assyria.

Gary Smith: Three of the most distinctive aspects of Hosea's preaching are:

- (1) his creative use of bold imagery to describe the covenant relationship that Israel was destroying by its unfaithfulness;
- (2) his use of emotions to portray God and describe Israel's problems; and
- (3) his distinctive vocabulary and grammatical constructions.

Robin Routledge: One significant feature of the book of Hosea is the **frequent use of similes and metaphors** (Wolff 1974: xxiv; Kruger 1988a; Hubbard 1989: 37–38; Eidevall 1996; Macintosh 1997: lxiii; Dearman 2010: 10–13; Stovell 2015). **Chapters 1–3** contain the key metaphor of Israel as Yahweh's adulterous wife; and the metaphor of adultery or prostitution continues into the rest of the book (e.g. **4:13–14; 5:3; 7:4**). **Chapter 11** employs another familial metaphor, with Israel as Yahweh's ungrateful son. Metaphors and similes use a variety of images, including from domestic life, from the animal kingdom, from agriculture and from nature. As well as Israel's husband and father, God is like a lion (**5:14; 13:7**), a leopard (**13:7**) and a bear (**13:8**). Israel is likened to a stubborn heifer (**4:16**), a wild donkey (8:9), a trained heifer (**10:11**) and a senseless dove (**7:11**). The leaders are like a heated oven (**7:4, 6**), and the nation, a part-baked cake (**7:8**). They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind (**8:7**); their love (*hesed*), and the nation itself, is like a transient morning mist (**6:4; 13:3**).

Hosea also makes considerable use of **wordplay** (see Hubbard 1989: 38; Morris 1996; Macintosh 1997: lxiv; Dearman 2010: 13–14). There are several plays on the name Ephraim (*'eprayim*). As noted above, Ephraim is likened to a heifer (*pārâ*, **4:16**) and a wild donkey (*pere'*, **8:9**). And Ephraim is also related to fruitfulness (*pārâ'*, **13:15; pērî**, **9:16; 14:8**). As we

have also seen, **12:3** links the name Jacob (*ya ʾāqōb*) with the verb *ʾāqab* ('to cheat, supplant'). There is, too, **alliteration and assonance**. So, for example, **4:16** includes the phrase *sōrērā sārār yiśrā'ēl* – '(like a) stubborn (heifer) Israel is stubborn'. Similar-sounding words also occur in **9:15**, where Israel's 'leaders' (*šārīm*) are described as 'rebels' (*sōrrērīm*), and in **7:14–15**, where the people have turned against (*šūr*) God, even though God has instructed (*yāsar*) them. Similarly, there is a link between Jezreel (*yizrē'e'l*) and Israel (*yiśrā'ēl*), which look and sound similar (e.g. **1:4–5**).

Allen Guenther: Its Beauty and Power

Hosea is the stuff of artists' daydreams and translators' nightmares. The author compresses ideas into compact, image-filled prophetic pronouncements. Figures of speech tumble over one another, inviting the reader into a complex world of multilevel relationships and meaning. Thoughts cascade in fits and starts. The emotional intensity varies only slightly through recurring cycles of disappointment, anger, and hope, for in Hosea we are encountering a prophet still raw from the wounds of offended love.

Hosea is a master of the diatribe, satirical criticism. He turns the people's words against them with the thrust and parry of an expert swordsman. He quotes their everyday speech; he knows their practices (**4:25; 13:2**), proverbs (**9:7**), prayers (**2:16; 8:2; 11:7**), and pride (**12:8**). Hosea writes as an insider, one intimately familiar with the people's ways of thinking and speaking.

John Goldingay: Like all poetry, his work is dense, intense, closely packed, involved, and complex. One way the poetry achieves this denseness is the general omission of some of the little words that facilitate communication in prose. Hosea's poetry is more distinctively characterized by asyndeton, juxtaposing clauses without indicating their interrelationship. Both characteristics require people to listen or read carefully and to keep rethinking the significance of what they have heard or read; Hosea cannot be read quickly. Interwoven with the use of asyndeton is a greater-than-usual inclination to vary the order of words in sentences by not putting the verb first in accordance with the usual Hebrew order, which makes it possible to nuance sentences and add emphasis. . .

A key aspect of poetry's denseness is the use of imagery. . . Metaphors and similes do more than illustrate things that we already know. They enable us to see new things through juxtaposing realities that do not usually come together. . . Further, images presuppose, testify to, and evidence the oneness of the reality that they describe. In a strange way, for the same reason the difference between the two realities means that images also obscure things in the sense of making them more mysterious. Images are confusing. . .

Paronomasia characteristically involves the juxtaposition of words that are similar, though unrelated in etymology and/or meaning. It thereby suggests links between the realities to which they refer or (paradoxically) suggests contrasts between things that perhaps should be related. In a number of examples Hosea's paronomasia involves using words in distinctive ways or using unusual forms of words, another practice that makes it necessary to resist the temptation to suspect the text or conform it to more typical usage (e.g., **2:12 [14]; 5:2; 8:4**). Related to paronomasia is the use of metonymy (e.g., **9:2; 14:5, 6 [6, 7]**) and of irony (e.g., **2:7 [9]; 4:13; 5:3; 8:3; 9:16; 13:2–3; 14:9 [10]**).

The nature of poetry is to explore, to draw attention to things, and to defamiliarize, in order that people may see things in a new way or for the first time. In this sense, its aim is not to persuade people to do something. Yet Hosea's own aim is not simply to get his people to see. It is to drive them to turn back to Yahweh and thus deal with the issues he identifies in their lives.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The imagery is diverse and emotionally charged (cf. **12:10**). On the one hand, Israel is represented by a battery of unflattering metaphors. The nation is an unfaithful wife (**chs. 1–3**), a stubborn heifer (**4:16; 10:11**), evaporating dew (**6:4; 13:3**), fleeting mist and smoke (**6:4; 13:3**), a hot oven (**7:3–7**), a burnt cake (**7:8**), a silly dove (**7:11; 11:11**), a foolish farmer (**8:7**), a useless vessel (**8:8**), a stray donkey (**8:9**), a worthless fruit tree (**9:10, 16**), a bad vine (**10:1**), a hapless twig (**10:7**), a disobedient child (**11:1–4**), and a childless woman (**13:13**). Not all is negative or hopeless, however. Someday Israel will be wooed by the Lord and their marital bonds renewed (**2:14–20**). Then the nation will be a beautiful flower and like a firmly rooted, bountiful tree (**14:5–7**).

Yahweh, too, is characterized in assorted metaphors, each of which reveals a different facet of the profound mystery of his person and character. Some reference judgment: he is a moth that will ruin the nation (**5:12**), a wild animal that devours (**5:14–15; 13:8**), a fowler who traps birds (**7:12**), and a farmer who yokes Israel, his ox (**11:4**). Yet Yahweh is not solely a stern judge: he is a forgiving and romantic husband (**chs. 2–3**), a loving parent (**11:1–4; 14:3–4**), a healing physician (**14:4**), fresh dew (**14:5**), and the source of all blessing (**14:8**).

These metaphors and similes are designed to strike the hearts and imaginations of God's people. Some shock, by exposing the ugliness and depth of sin and straightforwardly compelling repentance; others comfort and encourage the faithful to trust in the goodness of God and persevere through the coming judgment. It is important to emphasize that the overriding pictures of Yahweh and his people point to restoration. The book's final word is not one of an angry deity committed to destroying a sinful nation. Above all else, Yahweh is a caring spouse, a patient parent, and a beneficent doctor, who rejoices in the renewal of his people.

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES:

John MacArthur: That the faithless wife, Gomer, is symbolic of faithless Israel is without doubt; but questions remain. First, some suggest that the marital scenes in **chaps. 1–3** should be taken only as allegory. However, there is nothing in the narrative, presented in simple prose, which would even question its literal occurrence. Much of its impact would be lost if not literal. When non-literal elements within the book are introduced, they are prefaced with “*saw*” (**5:13; 9:10, 13**), the normal Hebraic means of introducing non-literal scenes. Furthermore, there is no account of a prophet ever making himself the subject of an allegory or parable.

Second, what are the moral implications of God's command for Hosea to marry a prostitute? It appears best to see Gomer as chaste at the time of marriage to Hosea, only later having become an immoral woman. The words “*take yourself a wife of harlotry*” are to be understood proleptically, i.e., looking to the future. An immoral woman could not serve as a picture of Israel

coming out of Egypt (2:15; 9:10), who then later wandered away from God (11:1). **Chapter 3** describes Hosea taking back his wife, who had been rejected because of adultery, a rejection that was unjustifiable if Hosea had married a prostitute with full knowledge of her character.

A third question arises concerning the relationship between **chap. 1** and **chap. 3** and whether the woman of **chap. 3** is Gomer or another woman. There are a number of factors which suggest that the woman of **chap. 3** is Gomer. In 1:2, God's command is to "*Go, take;*" in 3:1, however, His command is to "*Go again, love,*" suggesting that Hosea's love was to be renewed to the same woman. Furthermore, within the analogy of **chap. 1**, Gomer represents Israel. As God renews His love toward faithless Israel, so Hosea is to renew his love toward faithless Gomer. For **Hos. 3** to denote a different woman would confuse the analogy.

Homer Heater: The prophet's marriage has provoked as much debate and discussion as almost any other OT prophetic passage. **H. H. Rowley**, in a definitive article on the issue, opts for an old accepted view: Hosea was divinely instructed to **marry an immoral woman**. The first child, Jezreel, was Hosea's, but some would argue that the other two were not his (this depends on how one interprets 2:4). She left Hosea and consorted with paramours, but God instructed Hosea to go bring her back to him. She had apparently become enslaved for debt, and he was forced to pay a price to bring her back to him.

Because of the ethical issue of God asking Hosea to marry an immoral woman and then later to take her back after she had committed adultery, some try to avoid the idea that she was an immoral woman when Hosea married her. The problem is not obviated by saying that she was not immoral when Hosea married her since God still told him to marry her knowing that she would later become immoral. We should probably accept the fact that God often asked His prophets to do difficult things such as going naked and barefoot (Isaiah) and eating dung (Ezekiel).

Gary Smith: We believe it is best to accept a literal historical interpretation and conclude that Gomer was sexually involved with other men before and after her marriage with Hosea. There is little to support the idea that she was a temple prostitute, that this was all just a dream, or that Hosea married two different women.

PURPOSE OF WRITING

Chuck Swindoll: More than any other prophet, Hosea linked his message closely with his personal life. By marrying a woman he knew would eventually betray his trust and by giving his children names that sent messages of judgment on Israel, Hosea's prophetic word flowed out of the life of his family. The cycle of repentance, redemption, and restoration evident in Hosea's prophecy—and even his marriage (**Hosea 1:2; 3:1–3**)—remains intimately connected to our lives. This sequence plays itself out in the lives of real people, reminding us that the Scriptures are far from a mere collection of abstract statements with no relation to real life. No, they work their way into our day-to-day existence, commenting on issues that impact all our actions and relationships.

Structured around **five cycles of judgment and restoration**, the book of Hosea makes clear its repetitious theme: though God will bring judgment on sin, He will always bring His people back to Himself. God's love for Israel, a nation of people more interested in themselves than in God's direction for their lives, shines through clearly against the darkness of their idolatry and injustice (**Hosea 14:4**).

Throughout the book, Hosea pictured the people turning away from the Lord and turning toward other gods (**4:12–13; 8:5–6**). This propensity for idolatry meant that the Israelites lived as if they were not God's people. And though God told them as much through the birth of Hosea's third child, Lo-ammi, He also reminded them that He would ultimately restore their relationship with Him, using the intimate and personal language of "sons" to describe His wayward people (**1:9–10; 11:1**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Book of Hosea has profound implications for our own personal relationship with God. We are confronted with our own false gods, spiritual adultery, and God's judgment for our denial of the covenants of Sinai and Calvary in Christ's blood. We have received *hesed* in full measure in Christ and yet often are unfaithful disciples. As part of the bride of Christ, the church, we have been called to holy living and yet must confess our corporate lack of first love commitment to the Bridegroom. And in our relationships with people we are challenged by the call to love again those who have hurt and misused us.

As individuals and as the church, a study of Hosea is disturbing before it is comforting. We are drawn irresistibly into the book and find ourselves inside the skin of Hosea as he endures the pain of his marriage and realizes the anguish of God. But we will also be forced to identify with Israel and be led into a deeper realization of our own need to return to the Lord.

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

James Mays: Hosea's theology is a very articulate and specific understanding of Yahweh as God of Israel and Israel as the people of Yahweh. These two foci of his faith belong to the same ellipse; they are inseparably related. Yahweh is known through his acts for Israel and his declaration of his will for them. Israel is defined, identified, and judged in the context of those deeds and instructions. This history of Yahweh's relationship with Israel is the sphere within which the thought of Hosea moves. Unlike Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah he appears to have spoken no oracles about foreign nations. Assyria, and in a secondary way Egypt, come within the horizons of his concern; but they only appear in connection with Yahweh's dealings with Israel. The theology which finds expression in the speech of Hosea is a direct descendant of the all-Israel Yahwist faith of the old tribal league. . .

From the opening verses of **ch. 1** to the concluding oracle in **ch. 14**, the cult and mythology of the god Baal is the foil of most of Hosea's sayings. Through Hosea Yahweh wrestles to win his people free from this other god and from the way of viewing themselves and reality which goes with his cult. In this, Hosea is successor to the great Elijah. In the encounter Hosea is both polemicist and apologist. His condemnation of Israel's commerce with Baal and of any syncretistic modification of Yahwism by the influence of Baalism is unyielding. But he also

adapts the motifs and rubrics of the fertility cult to portray the relation of Yahweh and his people, to diagnose Israel's sin, and to describe the future which God will create. With daring skill he appropriates the language and thought of Canaanite religion while rejecting Baalism itself. By this strategy Hosea achieves a fresh modernism that plunges into the contemporaneity of his audience. . .

The reproaches of Hosea were aimed at two primary targets; in his eyes the failure of Israel was manifested in its cultic and political life. In the first part of the book there is a virtual preoccupation with Israel's involvement with the fertility religion of Canaan. Baal is the great antagonist in the struggle for the soul of Israel. In Jeroboam's kingdom the long process of syncretism had reached a culmination in which the worship and understanding of Yahweh had been Canaanized and there was outright practice of the Baal cult. Baals were adored as deities of the land at state shrines and local high places (2.13, 17; 9.10; 11.2; 13.1). Baal's devotees believed him to be the creator of the land's fertility and divine source of crops, flocks, and children (2.5, 8, 12; 7.14; 9.1f., 11f.). The appropriate ritual of sympathetic magic to ensure the effectiveness of the deity's procreative powers dominated the cult; sexual rites with the use of sacred prostitutes and bacchanalian celebration marked the festivals (4.11–14, 18). Sacrifice was understood as a means of influencing God to procure his material blessings (4.13; 5.6; 8.11, 13; 10.1). The old aniconic purity of Yahwism had been abandoned; images were all over the land (8.4–6; 10.5; 11.2; 13.2; 14.3, 8). In all this apostasy the priests who were responsible for the knowledge of God in Israel bore a particular guilt; their avarice and corruption infected the very sources of faith for the people (4.4–10; 6.9).

The royal court and its policies was the second target of Hosea's reproaches. Israel's leaders were party to the national apostasy; their international stratagems were a substitute for turning to Yahweh. Guilt for the blood of Jezreel was on the head of Jeroboam II (1.4). His successors, who reached the throne by conspiracy and assassination, turned bloodshed into a normal technique of politics (7.3–7). Once on the throne these men saw the monarchy as the source of Israel's strength (7.16; 8.14; 10.13). In the recurrent crises of the period they turned to Egypt and Assyria in an attempt to build national security by clever diplomacy (5.13; 7.8f., 11; 8.9f.; 14.3). All these kings and leaders were the creatures of Israel's sin; Yahweh had no part in their tenure (8.4). Indeed, they were the instruments of his wrath (13.11). The texts do not furnish unambiguous evidence concerning Hosea's attitude toward kingship per se. The reference to Gilgal in 9.15 has been read as an assertion that all Israel's evil started with the inauguration of Saul; but this construction is uncertain. Yet, one gets the impression that Hosea thought Israel's experience with the monarchy was little better than their involvement with Canaanite religion. Israel should have no other saviour but Yahweh (13.4, 10). These kings had come between Yahweh and Israel, corrupted covenant (10.4), entangled the nation in deceptive alliances to evade Yahweh's punishment, created false hopes of independent security. Though 1.10f. is not certain to be from Hosea, it is the one political oracle of salvation in the book; it looks for a reconstitution of the people under a chief along the lines of the tribal league.

John Piper: Call Me Husband, Not Baal

Love God warmly as your husband, don't just serve him as your Lord. . .

If you get your kicks from somewhere else, you commit great harlotry against God. . .

Gomer is going to bear three children, and each one is going to symbolize the judgment

of God which harlotry always begets. The first is named Jezreel to remind the people of the fury of Jehu (a former king of Israel) when he killed Joram and Amaziah and Jezebel and 70 sons of Ahab in the city of Jezreel. Even though Jehu was carrying out the penal purposes of God, he was reckless and impetuous and high-handed in his dealings. When God says in **verse 5** that he will therefore break the bow of Israel, he means that this is still Israel's spirit. She is unfaithful and begets violence and treachery. The first son stands for this sin of Israel.

I see in **Hosea 2:14–23** at least three things God does for us, his rebellious wife, to win us back; and I see one overriding thing that he wants from us. The first thing he does is **woo us tenderly**. **Verse 14:** *"Behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her."* We are all guilty of harlotry. We have loved other lovers more than God. We have gotten our kicks elsewhere. He has been at times an annoying deity. We, like Gomer, were enslaved to a paramour, the world, pleasure, ambition. But God has not cast us off. He promises to take us into the wilderness. He wants to be alone with us. Why? So that he can speak tenderly to us. Literally, the Hebrew says, so that he can speak "to her heart." And when he speaks, he will allure you. He will entice you and woo you. He will say what a lover says to his lady when they walk away from the party into the garden. God wants to talk that way with you. Go with him into the wilderness and listen with your heart. Do not think you are too ugly or too rotten. He knows that his wife is a harlot. That's the meaning of mercy: God is wooing a wife of harlotry.

The second thing God does is **promise her hope and safety**. **Verse 15:** *"And there I will give her vineyards and make the valley of Achor a door of hope."* The valley of Achor is where Israel was first unfaithful to the Lord in the promised land. Just after Israel entered the land, Achan kept the forbidden booty and caused the defeat at Ai. But now God promises that if his harlot will come home, Achor will no longer be a "valley of trouble" (**Joshua 7:26**), but a **door of hope**. She will come home to rich vineyards. **Verse 18** spells out her hope in more detail: *"I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, 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."* If only his estranged wife will come home, she will find a paradise with her husband: he will make a pact even with the animals, lest they do harm; and he will remove all violence and conflict. These are no doubt the words God speaks into the heart of his wife in the lonely place. "It will be so good, so good! Put away your harlotry and come home."

The third thing God does is **renew his wife's betrothal and consummate the marriage again in purity**. **Verses 19, 20:** *"And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord."* Three times: *I will betroth you; I will betroth you; I will betroth you.* "We will go back to the days of our engagement. We will start over. Harlots can start over! We will lay a fresh foundation: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness. Things will not only be good in the paradise around us. Things will also be right between us. These have always been my ways; but

now they will be mutual." Yes, even a wife of harlotry can experience a new relationship of righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, and faithfulness with her divine husband.

But the most daring statement of all is the last one in **verse 20**: "*And you shall know the Lord.*" To see what this means, recall the peculiar use of the word "*know*" in the Bible. For example, **Genesis 4:1**, "*Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.*" And **Matthew 1:25**, "*Joseph knew her [Mary] not until she had borne a son.*" In the context of a broken marriage being renewed with the fresh vows of betrothal, must not the words, "*and you shall know the Lord*" (**v. 20**), mean, you shall enjoy an intimacy like that of the purest sexual intercourse. When the wife of harlotry returns to her husband, he will withhold nothing. He will not keep her at a distance. The fellowship and communion and profoundest union he will give to his prodigal wife when she comes home broken and empty.

This is the **gospel story** in the Old Testament. This is the meaning of Christmas interpreted seven centuries before Christ. God comes to woo us tenderly to himself; he promises us fullest hope and safety; he starts over with any who will come, and offers us the most intimate and pleasure-filled relationship possible.

And what must we do to qualify? What does he want from us? **Verse 16**: "*In that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal.'*" I think the word Baal here has a double meaning. As the next verse shows, it means one of the false gods of Israel's idolatry. So **verse 16** means: "You will no longer include me as one of many gods, or many lovers; you will talk to me as your only true God and husband."

But there is another sense of the word Baal. Fifteen times in the Old Testament it simply means "*husband*," but husband in the sense of owner and lord. The Baals were Israel's hard masters as well as her lovers. In **7:14**, for example, the people gashed themselves to try to get benefits from the Baals (just like the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in **1 Kings 18:28**). When Israel chose a Baal for her "significant other," she chose a cruel and merciless lord. So the other (and I think primary) meaning of **Hosea 2:16** is: "*Relate to me as a loving husband, not as a harsh master or owner. In that day, says the Lord, you will call me 'My husband,' and you will no longer call me 'My Baal.'*"

The good news at the end of 1982 is that God wants you to love him warmly as your husband, not just serve him dutifully as your Lord.

http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/41/372_Call_Me_Husband_Not_Baal/

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The message of Hosea is simple: the justice of God brings punishment for sin; the love of God brings restoration for repentance. After a personal illustration of God's sovereign plan of redemption in the life of the prophet (**chaps, one-three**), Hosea reveals God's

holiness through an indictment of faithless Israel (**chaps, four-seven**), His justice through an announcement of the penalty for that faithlessness (**chaps, eight-ten**), and His love through a proclamation of the certainty of the promise of national restoration (**chaps, eleven-fourteen**).

Robin Routledge: A key part of Hosea's message is to challenge the apostasy, idolatry and syncretistic religious practices of the nation. The people *do not know* (*yāda'*) Yahweh (e.g. **5:4; 11:3**), and offer unacceptable sacrifices (4:13–14; 6:6; 8:13; 9:4; 11:2; 12:11; 13:2). And, though the message is directed primarily at the northern kingdom, Judah does not escape criticism. Israel's priests, who lead the people into sin, face particular condemnation (**4:4–11; 5:1; 6:9; 10:5**). False worship results in a breakdown of right relationships within society and, though not as prominent as in Amos, condemnation of social sins is also a feature of Hosea's prophecy. The people, badly led by the priests, disobey God's law (**4:6; 8:1, 12; 9:17**); there is a lack of righteousness (cf. **2:19; 10:12**) and justice (cf. **2:19; 12:6**); evildoers break into houses or rob in the streets (**6:8–9; 7:1**); there is drunkenness (**7:5**), sexual misconduct (**4:2, 14, 18**), dishonesty (**4:2; 7:3; 10:4, 13; 12:7**), bloodshed and murder (**4:2; 6:9; 12:14**). Related to idolatry is the nation's failure to rely on Yahweh. Hosea condemns the arrogance of those who trust in their own strength (**7:10; 10:13**; see also **8:14; 12:8; 13:6**), turn to other gods (**2:5; 3:1**) or look to Egypt and Assyria for help (**5:13; 7:11; 12:1**; cf. **14:3**). He condemns, too, the people's ingratitude and failure to appreciate the blessings Yahweh has given them (**2:8; 7:15; 11:2–4; 13:5–6**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The one to whom Israel is bound is **sovereign over all**. Yahweh is Lord over creation; he alone grants fertility to the nation's crops (e.g., **2:8, 18–22**). He directs the movement of every nation and the superpowers. Yahweh can utilize other peoples for judgment (e.g., **10:6–10, 14–15; 11:6; 13:15–16**), emphasizes the folly of entering into alliances with them (**5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 9:3; 12:1**), and exposes the limited power of empires (**5:13; 14:3**). The politics of Israel should be guided by a unique set of priorities and commitments. Its ruling elites and monarchy are fiercely criticized for their lack of ethics and for policies that manifest rebellion against God and that are, on occasion, associated with a cult that Yahweh abhors (e.g., **5:1–2, 10; 6:11–7:7; 8:4; 13:9–11**). Sharp attacks on the monarchy have led some to wonder whether the prophet is against the very institution of kingship. This is too extreme a view. What is made clear is that the northern kingdom's king and government are illegitimate in God's sight. The hope is that someday Israel will be reunited with Judah under a Davidic king (**1:11; 3:4–5**).

H. D. Beeby: The first of these patterns is that of **recapitulation**. Hosea has one basic sermon or set of themes, and these themes appear and reappear throughout the book; the book as a whole has thus been fashioned to make its overall structure conform to these same themes. The clearest statement of the themes is to be found in **Hos. 11**—a good place to begin the study of the book. There in outline is the word of the LORD which came to Hosea. God chose Israel and showered her with grace abounding. Israel's response was rebellion and more sin. This drew from God the just condemnation and the punishment that such rebellion deserves. Unable to learn from her history, Israel is destined to repeat it; she must go back into bondage. But God is God and therefore gracious. God's last word is a word of compassion and restoration. The God who reigns is the God who saves. This basic scheme is never far from us.

STRUCTURE

David Malick: The reason (Judah and especially) Israel are going to be judged by the God of loyal love is because they have not been faithful to the covenant and thus need to repent in order to receive a future restoration to the land

I. Setting: 1:1

II. The LORD's loyal love for the idolatrous, northern kingdom of Israel is demonstrated through Hosea's marriage to Gomer **1:2 - 3:5**

III. The LORD directly indicts the nation Israel (and Judah) for their breaking of their covenantal relationship with Him in three specific areas:

- (1) their lack and rejection of the knowledge of the LORD,
- (2) their lack of loyal love, and
- (3) their faithlessness—

in order to reveal the reason for their coming judgment which ultimately will lead to restoration **4:1 - 13:6**

A. In a summary statement the LORD indicts the nation of Israel for their lack of faithfulness, kindness and knowledge of God which results in judgment in the land **4:1-3**

B. The First Indictment: The LORD indicts the nation for a lack of *knowledge* and a rejection of *knowledge* of the LORD so that they will understand the coming affliction which will cause them to turn to Him and be restored **4:4-19**

C. The Second Indictment: The LORD indicts Israel and Judah for having a lack of *loyal love* in order that they might understand the coming purifying judgment and possible repent to their loyal God who will restore them to the Land **6:4 - 11:11**

D. Third Indictment: The LORD indicts Israel for having a lack of faithfulness so that they will understand their coming judgment and return to Him who will not completely destroy them due to His faithfulness **11:12 - 13:16**

IV. The LORD calls upon the nation to repent and turn to Him for restoration **14:1-8**

V. Conclusion: The reader is exhorted to be wise unto life by understanding who the LORD is and obeying Him rather than being foolish and disobeying Him which would result in death **14:9**

Hampton Keathley:

It is hard to outline the prophetic books because the prophets alternate between listing sins, predicting judgment and then promising restoration, it is hard to pick out the macro structure or "big picture." Hosea is probably the hardest.

In the first three chapters we see Hosea's marriage to the prostitute, Gomer. His marriage to the unfaithful wife is to be an example of God's relationship with the unfaithful nation of Israel. In the first three chapters we alternate between the events in Hosea's message and God's explanation of how those events relate to the nation.

In **4-14**: we see Hosea's message of warning to the nation of Israel. I think you can see a parallel between the three sections describing Hosea's marriage and the major sections in the last part of the book, within these individual sections, we have several “mini” sermons which themselves alternate between **the listing of the sins, the pronouncement of judgment, the call to repentance and the promise of restoration.**

If you keep that in mind as you study the book, it will help keep you from getting lost in the details.

J. Sidlow Baxter: THE PROPHET OF PERSEVERING LOVE

All the trouble in that ten-tribed kingdom of long ago originated in the worship of the two golden calves which king Jeroboam installed at Dan and Bethel. By the time Hosea lived, those calves and the illicit cult which grew up around them had brought the nation to such a moral condition that Divine judgment could be staved off little longer.

Prologue (i.-iii.) – the whole story in symbol

I. ISRAEL’S SIN INTOLERABLE: GOD IS HOLY (iv.-vii.)

The Fivefold Indictment (iv., v.)

Israel’s Unreal “Return” (vi.)

Healing Made Impossible (vii.)

II. ISRAEL SHALL BE PUNISHED: GOD IS JUST (viii.-x.)

The Trumpet of Judgment (viii)

These chapters throughout are expressions of wrath to come

III. ISRAEL SHALL BE RESTORED: GOD IS LOVE (xi.-xiv.)

Divine Yearning (xi.)

Yet Israel Must Suffer (xii., etc.)

The Final victory of Love (xiv.)

Charles Ryrie: (from Study Bible)

I. The Prodigal Wife, Hosea 1:1 - 3:5

A. Her Unfaithfulness, **Hosea 1:1-11**

B. Her Punishment, **Hosea 2:1-13**

C. Her Restoration and Israel's, **Hosea 2:14-23**

D. Her Redemption, **Hosea 3:1-5**

II. The Prodigal People, Hosea 4:1 - 14:9

A. The Message of Judgment, **Hosea 4:1 - 10:15**

1. The indictment, **Hosea 4:1-19**

2. The verdict, **Hosea 5:1-15**
3. The plea of Israel, **Hosea 6:1-3**
4. The reply of the Lord, **Hosea 6:4-11**
5. The crimes of Israel, **Hosea 7:1-16**
6. The prophecy of judgment, **Hosea 8:1 - 10:15**
- B. The Message of Restoration, **Hosea 11:1 - 14:9**
 1. God's love for the prodigal people, **Hosea 11:1-11**
 2. God's chastisement of the prodigal people, **Hosea 11:12 - 13:16**
 3. God's restoration of the prodigal people, **Hosea 14:1-9**

Chuck Swindoll: Overview Bible Chart

	PERSONAL <i>THE AGONY OF AN UNFAITHFUL SPOUSE</i>		NATIONAL <i>THE TRAGEDY OF AN UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE</i>		
	Hosea 1-3		Hosea 4-14		
	Marriage Children Separation Reunion		Series of sermons declaring the sin of the people and the character of God Model of the message as Hosea remains true to his wife in spite of her infidelity		
	Adulterous wife, faithful husband		Adulterous nation, faithful God		
	"Go and marry a prostitute." (<i>Hos. 1:2</i>)	"Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover." (<i>Hos. 3:1</i>)	Nation is guilty God is holy	Nation needs judgment God is just	Nation has hope God is love
THEME	God's faithful love toward His unfaithful people				
KEY VERSES	Hosea 2:19-20; 3:1; 11:1-12				
CHRIST IN HOSEA	Christ's being "called out" from hiding in Egypt as a child is pictured in Hosea's record of Israel's Exodus from Egypt (<i>Hos. 11:1; see Matt. 2:15</i>). In Hosea's redemption of Gomer from the slave market, Christ is pictured as the loving, faithful Redeemer of sinful humanity.				

Bruce Hurt:

NARRATIVE			S E R M O N S										
PURPOSE: Symbolic Illustration			PURPOSE: Spiritual Restoration										
1:1	2:2	3:1	4:1	5:1	5:15	7:6	8:1	9	10	11	12	13	14
PERSONAL: adulterous wife and faithful husband			NATIONAL: adulterous people and faithful Lord										
"Marry"	"Plead"	"Love again"	SIN AND GUILT PROMINENT * * * TRANSGRESSION			JUDGMENT PROMINENT * * * VISITATION			HOPE PROMINENT * * * RESTORATION				
MARRIAGE	SEPARATION	REUNION	<i>God is holy</i>			<i>God is just</i>			<i>God is love</i>				

KEY VERSES:
3:1
6:4
10:12
11:3,8
14:4

KEY WORDS:
know
knowledge
hear
mercy
love
return
Israel (44)
Ephraim (37)
Judah (15)
I will
(of Jehovah, 57)

OUTLINE OF HOSEA

A STORY OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOYAL LOVE THROUGHOUT THE REPEATED CYCLES OF UNFAITHFULNESS, DISCIPLINE AND RESTORATION

Hosea 2:29 *“And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.
Then you will know the Lord.”*

Hosea 14:4 *“I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from them.”*

(1:1 – 3:5) ISRAEL’S INFIDELITY ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIAGE OF FAITHFUL PROPHET AND ADULTEROUS WIFE

A. (1:1) Historical Background

B. (1:2-9) Story of the Prophet Who Married the Prostitute – Israel’s Corruption as Pictured in Hosea’s Marriage to the Prostitute and Her Children of Harlotry Provides the Backdrop for God’s Amazing Unconditional Love

1. (:2-3) Significant Marriage with Symbolic Meaning
2. (:4-9) Significant Children with Symbolic Meaning

C. (1:10-11) Blessings of Messianic Restoration of Israel – The Future Messianic Restoration of Ethnic Israel Will Be Glorious and Permanent

1. National Increase – Restoration from Small Remnant to Great Numbers
2. National Acceptance – Restoration from Rejection to Adoption as Sons
3. National Unity – Restoration from Scattering and Division to Gathering Together and Unity
4. National Submission to Messianic Leadership –
Restoration from the Leadership of Multiple Pagan Kings to the Leadership of the One Good Shepherd
5. National Glory – Restoration from Shame and Disgrace to Blessing and Glory

D. (2:1-13) Religious Syncretism of Israel and Its Tragic Consequences -- Forsaking God Creates a Vacuum Filled By Syncretistic Worship that Has Shameful and Devastating Consequences

- (:1) Transition – Anticipation of Eschatological Renewal
1. (:2-5) Divine Accusation of Infidelity Leading to Severe Judgment

2. (:6-8) Divine Consequences of Syncretistic Worship
3. (:9-12) Detailed Punishments
4. (:13) Damning Indictment Summarized

**E. (2:14-23) Restoration and Renewal of the Marriage Relationship –
God’s Steadfast Love and Faithfulness Will Restore and Renew His
Covenant Relationship to Israel in the End Times**

1. (:14-17) Renewal of Marriage Commitment
2. (:18-20) Renewal of Covenant Relationship
3. (:21-23) Renewal of Creation Design

**F. (3:1-5) Loyal Love Demonstrated in Renewal of Hosea’s Marriage –
The Inexplicable Love of God Persists in Recovering His People into
Covenant Relationship**

1. (:1-2) Shocking Persistence of God’s Love
2. (:3-4) Sanctification Process of God’s Love
3. (:5) Salvation Purpose of God’s

II. (4:1 – 13:16) ISRAEL’S INDICTMENT AND CERTAIN JUDGMENT

**A. (4:1-3) Summary of God’s Case Against Israel –
God’s Case Against Israel Exposes Her Moral Failures Derived from Not
Knowing God – Leading to Cosmic Consequences**

- (:1a) Solemn Summons – Pay Attention
1. (:1b) Compelling Case Against Israel
 2. (:1b-2) Comprehensive Charges
 3. (:3) Cosmic Consequences

B. (4:4 – 6:3) The First Indictment:

**The LORD Indicts the Nation for a Lack of Knowledge and a Rejection of
Knowledge of the LORD so that They Will Understand the Coming
Affliction Which Will Cause Them to Turn to Him and Be Restored**

1. (4:4-19) Rejection of God’s Word Leads to Judgment –
Corrupt Religious Leaders Provoke Judgment for the Rejection of God’s Word
 - a. (:4-6) Rejecting God’s Word Leads to Judgment on Both the People and
Their Corrupt Religious Leaders
 - b. (:7-10) Religious Corruption Perverts Glory into Shame
 - c. (:11-14) Ruination Attributed to Harlotry, Wine and Illegitimate Worship –
All Rooted in a Lack of Understanding
 - d. (:15-19) Remedy for Judah Requires Renouncing the Shameful Corruption of
Israel
2. (5:1-15) Inevitability of Judgment –
Judgment Is Inevitable Because of Israel’s Harlotry and God’s Holy Wrath
 - (:1a) Alert! Targeted Judgment
 - a. (:1b-7) Judgment Is Inevitable Because of Israel’s Harlotry
 - b. (:8-14) Judgment Is Inevitable Because of God’s Holy Wrath
 - (:15) Transition – Only Remedy Is Repentance and Seeking God

3. (6:1-3) Call to Return to the Lord –
The Path to Restoration Involves Repentance and Renewal
 - a. (:1-2) Repentance – Return to the Lord Who Heals and Gives New Life
 - b. (:3) Renewal – Pursue the Knowledge of the Lord Because We Can Count on His Blessing

C. (6:4 – 11:11) The Second Indictment:

The LORD Indicts Israel and Judah for Having a Lack of Loyal Love [Kindness] in Order that They Might Understand the Coming Purifying Judgment and Possibly Repent to Their Loyal God Who Will Restore Them to the Land

1. (6:4-11) Divine Frustration Over Lack of Loyalty –
Religious Rituals Cannot Compensate for Lack of Loyal Love and Treacherous Acts of Rebellion
 - a. (:4-6) Covenant Loyalty Lacking
 - b. (:7-11) Catalog of Nationwide Treachery
2. (7:1-16) Disintegration of a Nation that Refuses to Return to the Lord –
When There Is No Turning Back to the Lord, Moral Corruption Leads to Political Disintegration of a Nation (Both Internally and Internationally)
 - a. (:1-2) Moral Disintegration of Society
 - b. (:3-7) Political Disintegration of Society – Palace Intrigue and Revolt – Signs of Corruption
 - c. (:8-12) Foreign Entanglements – Looking for Help in All the Wrong Places
 - d. (:13-16) Failure to Return to the Lord Sparks Divine Lament
3. (8:1-14) A Nation That Has Forgotten Its God – Sow the Wind and Reap a Whirlwind – Dangerous Self-Reliance Fuels Covenant Transgression for a Nation that Has Forgotten Its God
 - a. (:1-6) Failed Covenant Fidelity
 - b. (:7-10) Fruitless Foreign Alliances
 - c. (:11-14) Futile Religious Pursuits
4. (9:1-17) Punishment for Israel's Apostasy –
The Judgment of Dispersion and Barrenness Characterizes a Nation Abandoned by God for Spiritual Harlotry and Deep Depravity
 - a. (:1-9) The Judgment of Dispersion and Abandonment
 - b. (:10-17) The Judgment of Barrenness and Abandonment
5. (10:1-15) Sow Wickedness and Reap God's Judgment –
God's Nation Characterized by Iniquity and Idolatry Must Convert or Suffer the Awful Consequences of Condemnation
 - a. (:1-8) Condemnation and Consequences
 - b. (:9-10) Crime and Chastisement
 - c. (:11-15) Conversion or Calamity
6. (11:1-11) God's Loving Commitment to an Ungrateful Prodigal Nation –
Compassion and Mercy Triumph Over Judgment as God Calls His Prodigal Nation to Return Home Despite Deserving Extinction
 - a. (:1-7) Spurned Grace Results in Bondage and Destruction –
Five Action-Response Sequences Contrasting Israel and Her God

- b. (:8-9) Holy Compassion Mitigates God's Wrath
- c. (:10-11) Future Restoration – The Lord Summons His People Back and Settles Them in the Promised Land

D. (11:12 – 13:16) The Third Indictment:

The LORD Indicts Israel for Having a Lack of Faithfulness so that They Will Understand Their Coming Judgment and Return to Him Who Will Not Completely Destroy Them Due to His Faithfulness

1. (11:12 – 12:14) Condemning Deceit, False Confidence and a Manipulating Spirit – Indicted for Spiritual and Moral Unfaithfulness, God's Elect Nation Faces Divine Retribution Despite the Call for Repentance and Hope of Ultimate Restoration Due to God's Steadfast Love
 - a. (11:12 – 12:6) Escaping Divine Retribution Requires a Spiritual Transformation After the Pattern of Deceitful Jacob
 - b. (12:7-8) Excusing Oppressive Exploitation Characterized by Misplaced Security and Mistaken Confidence
 - c. (12:9-14) Exchanging Future Restoration for Divine Retribution Is Israel's Tragic Story of Apostasy
2. (13:1-16) Arrogant Pursuit of Idolatry Leads to Certain Destruction – Death Devours When the Helpless Reject Their Helper
 - a. (:1-3) Promulgation of Idolatry Leading to Destruction – Holistic Summary
 - b. (:4-8) Perversion of God's Gracious Providence Leading to Destruction – Historical Review
 - c. (:9-11) Perversion of Monarchy Leading to Destruction – Helpless Leaders
 - d. (:12-16) Punishment Now Inescapable – Hope Despite Judgment

III. (14:1-9) ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND FUTURE BLESSING

A. (:1-3) Call for Repentance and Faith = Conditions for Restoration

1. (:1) Plea for Repentance
2. (:2) Process of Repentance
3. (:3) Partner of Repentance

B. (:4-8) Comfort in the Lord's Forgiveness, Healing, Blessing, Sufficiency

1. (:4) Based on the Steadfastness of God's Love and Compassion
(Which Overcomes His Anger)
2. (:5-7) Based on the Supply of God
(Which Promotes Growth, Beauty and Reputation)
3. (:8) Based on the Sufficiency of God
(Which Should Eliminate Any Inclination Towards Idols)

C. (:9) Closing Charge – Listen Up / Understand / Obey

TEXT: Hosea 1:1-9

TITLE: *STORY OF THE PROPHET WHO MARRIED THE PROSTITUTE*

BIG IDEA:

ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION AS PICTURED IN HOSEA'S MARRIAGE TO THE PROSTITUTE AND HER CHILDREN OF HARLOTRY PROVIDES THE BACKDROP FOR GOD'S AMAZING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

David Thompson: GOD DEMANDS HIS PROPHET MARRY AN IMMORAL HARLOT AND HAVE CHILDREN BY THE HARLOT TO ILLUSTRATE HOW CORRUPT AND IMMORAL HIS OWN FAMILY HAS BECOME IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIM; AND YET IN THE END GOD WILL BLESS HIS FAMILY BECAUSE HE LOVES HIS FAMILY.

Trent Butler: God charged his prophet to enact a drastic prophetic act through his own family. He married a prostitute, representing Israel's unfaithfulness, and named three children unthinkable names to symbolize the place of judgment, the reason for judgment, and the result of judgment. But God pointed to a future where faithfulness and a love relationship would be restored in Hosea's family and in God's relation to Israel.

Gary Smith: By setting Israel's sinful behavior in the framework of the vile behavior of a prostitute, Hosea reminds his audience both of the seriousness of sin (it destroys a mutual trusting relationship) and the amazing greatness of God's love.

David Allan Hubbard: To grasp the overall message of this first section, we must catch the significance of its **literary structure**. These three chapters are a two-part story (1:2–9; 3:1–5) wrapped around a three-part oracle (1:10 – 2:1; 2:2–13; 2:14–23). This structure produces a literary unit that can be described by the scheme A B1 BB1 A1, where A (1:2–9) is the story, whose point is judgment and A1 (3:1–5) is the story whose point is hope, while B (2:2–13) is the oracle whose announcement is judgment, and the B1 (1:10 – 2:1; 2:14–23) are the oracles whose proclamation is hope.

The envelope or inclusio formed by the two-part story with which the section opens and closes is not only a graceful literary device but an important theological pointer. This structure – in which Gomer's waywardness is described before Israel's sin is denounced, and Yahweh's restoration of Israel to full covenant privileges is promised before Hosea is commanded to demonstrate that restoration – packages the gist of the section: Gomer's betrayal of Hosea may foreshadow Israel's defection from Yahweh, but no human act of forgiveness can take priority over divine forbearance. When it comes to the exercise of grace God is mentor to us all.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Over the years, as I have preached or taught the Book of Hosea, I have found that it is crucial early on to personalize the dilemma of God in dealing with Israel's unfaithfulness by talking about **the cross in the heart of God**. There was a cross of judgment and forgiveness in God's heart before there was a cross on Calvary. Golgatha revealed God as both the just and the justifier (**Rom. 3:26**).

This becomes very real when we consider honestly God's problem with each of us. He cannot wink at our sin that separates us from Him or our sins that express our rebellion. At the same time, He must find a way to confront us and heal us. The astounding realization is that He persistently chooses to be our God regardless of what we've done or been. Amazing love, indeed. But love that we can never take for granted.

First main section of the book:

I. (1:1 – 3:5) ISRAEL'S INFIDELITY ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIAGE OF FAITHFUL PROPHET AND ADULTEROUS WIFE

Symbolic Narrative – rest of book is series of addresses to the people

H. D. Beebe: [He argues for keeping **1:2 – 2:1** together as a cohesive unity because:] hope always keeps breaking through. Dire warnings and promised destruction are followed by promises of restoration; fatal sicknesses carry hints of healing; chaos points to new creation; and despair points to hope. The sentence of death is rarely the last word, and the black cap so often donned becomes almost a sign of reprieve.

J. Andrew Dearman: When read together, **chs. 1–3** have a basic theme: God's judgment in the historical process will come against a faithless Israel, sometime after which God will initiate a period of restoration. Hosea's marriage and children are rendered through literary devices to illustrate the theme, and the texts are thoroughly shaped with that goal in mind.⁶ Indeed, each chapter—at least in English versification—gives a rendering of the same basic theme, moving from judgment to restoration.

(:1) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Communication of the Word of God via the Prophet Hosea

“The word of the Lord which came to Hosea the son of Beeri,”

H. D. Beebe: The word of the LORD “comes” to Hosea in time, in history, but it is timeless in its application (it “endures forever”). It is a word for all seasons and for all sorts and conditions of people.

Trent Butler: The **word of the LORD** appears 438 times in the Hebrew Bible from **Genesis 15:1** to **Malachi 1:1**. This is a distinctive of biblical religion: God constantly lets his people know his message. The problem lies in a people who refuse to accept and obey his message.

Allen Guenther: *Dabar* may also imply *affair, matter, business, thing*, as in *the matter (dabar) concerning Uriah (1 Kings 15:5)*. Hence, while God is communicating with

Hosea by means of words, he is not conveying speeches to be regurgitated. God is disclosing his intentions, his business with Israel. In the process of receiving the word of the Lord, the prophet becomes a member of the heavenly council, to whom God reveals his secret plans (**Amos 3:7**; cf. **Jer. 23:18**). Therefore, when Hosea interacts with God or offers a prophecy from his own lips, that word is to be regarded as coming from the counsel of the Lord; it consists of the purposes of God as fully as if he had quoted a first-person speech form Almighty.

Why are these books called Minor Prophets? Brevity ... not importance (cf. Is, Jer, Ez)

Order in the Hebrew bible:

- Prophets of the Assyrian Period (Hosea to Nahum) – pre-exilic
- Prophets of the Babylonian Captivity (Habakkuk and Zephaniah)
- Prophets of the Persian Period (after exile - Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

Name = Hoshea = “*salvation*” – same meaning as that of Joshua and Jesus

Prophet to the Northern kingdom of Israel and native of that area (Jonah = only other writing prophet from the North) – **755–710 BC** – long ministry (sometimes called Ephraim)

- contemporaries: Amos (just before Hosea), Micah and Isaiah
- ministry included the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Judah
- he has been called the Jeremiah of Israel – intensely sensitive and emotional right before the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria

Meyer Gruber: Standard English translations of the Bible (from KJV through NJPS), which reserve the form Hosea for the prophet named in **Hos. 1–2** and the Book that includes **Hos. 2:1**, employ the form *Hoshea* to represent all the other 4 biblical Hosheas.

David Thompson: We don’t know much about Hosea. Some have said they think he was a baker because he knew how to make bread (**Hosea 7:4**). Some say they think he was a farmer because he knew about sowing and plowing and harvesting crops (**Hosea 8:7; 10:13**).

Some say they think he was a priest because there are references in the book to the priests (**Hos. 4:4; 4:9; 5:1; 6:9**). Some think he was the son of one of the prophets or some professional prophet who had attended a prophet’s school (**Hos. 1:2; 4:5; 9:7-8**). The truth is we just can’t say for sure.

We do know that his father’s name was **Beeri (Hosea 1:1)**. Now we do not know if there is any connection but according to **Genesis 26:34**, Esau married a woman named Judith, who was the daughter of a Hittite named Beeri. It is hard to know if there is an ethnic connection. But one thing we do know is that you do not have to come from some big name Christian family to be greatly used by God. Hosea didn’t.

James Limburg: Behind these sayings is also a person of **unusual sensitivity**. Because of his own heart-wrenching experiences with his family, Hosea is able to describe the anguish in the heart of God like no other prophet. **Abraham Heschel** said, “Amos dwells on what God has done . . . Hosea dwells on what God has felt for Israel” (*The Prophets*, p. 60). The anguish of God over a faithless people is like that of a husband over a wife who is ungrateful and unfaithful (**2:8, 13**). The pain in the heart of God is like the pain in the heart of a parent who has invested decades in child rearing only to have that child turn out to be a rebel (**11:1–4**).

B. Contemporary Kings of Judah and Israel

1. Kings of Judah

“during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah,”

Derek Kidner: It had been at first a time of growing affluence, thanks to the brief respite which these little kingdoms found themselves enjoying while their strongest neighbours happened, for once, to be preoccupied and weak. Damascus, their most recent scourge, had been crippled by Assyria in 802; and then Assyria itself, that grim Mesopotamian war-machine, had begun to falter under threats from without and disunity within.

But with Israel’s wealth had come increasing decadence; and then, halfway through the century, their world began to crumble. At home, the two strong kings, Jeroboam II of Israel and his contemporary, Uzziah of Judah, were at or near the end of their long reigns, while in the distance Assyria had roused itself to a new pitch of terrifying strength and militancy. It was soon to march on Palestine. Within a generation the kingdom of Israel would be extinct.

It was to this generation that Hosea was sent to preach repentance.

2. Kings of Israel

“and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”

Jeroboam II was the king in Israel

Historical Background: 2 Kings 14-20; 2 Chron. 26-32

Had reason to be intense and emotional – this was Israel’s last call to repentance; they were already too far gone and too corrupt; judgment was coming

Religious and cultural conditions during reign of Jeroboam II

Political peace; material prosperity – but moral and religious corruption; after Jeroboam II, kingdom became chaotic – short reigns of a succession of kings ended by coups and assassinations

Reign of **Tiglathpileser III** – king of Assyria 745-727 BC

David Thompson: Actually even though Hosea's life spanned more than one Israelite king, he only mentions one Israelite king (Jeroboam) and four Judean kings.

This actually seems odd because Hosea is ministering to Israel and yet he only mentions one king from Israel, **Jeroboam**, but he mentions four kings from Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He completely eliminates Israel's kings (Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea) (**II Kings 15**). Most believe the reason for this is because Jeroboam was the last good king and those who came after him were worthless kings who led Israel into idolatry and immorality.

Duane Garrett: Why did Hosea neglect to mention the rest of the kings of Israel? The reason appears to be twofold.

- First, he regarded Jeroboam II as the last king of Israel with any shred of legitimacy. Those after him were a pack of assassins and ambitious climbers who had no right to the title "king." Hosea's assessment of the kings of Israel appears in texts like **7:1–7**.
- Second, he hoped for better things from Judah. At times he criticized the south as heavily as the north (**5:5, 12**), but he also prayed that they not follow Israel's lead (**4:15**). Most importantly, he looked for salvation and reunification in the line of David (**3:5**).

I. (:2-3) SIGNIFICANT MARRIAGE WITH SYMBOLIC MEANING

"When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea,"

A. (:2) Shocking Command

1. Issuing the Command -- Highlighting Israel's Corruption and Apostasy -- Enter into an Immoral Relationship

a. Hook Up with a Wife of Harlotry

"Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry,"

Different views:

- 1) actually marry a prostitute – but nothing seems wrong in the early stages of birth of first son; this would be very strange – would not picture the condition of a redeemed people who subsequently would commit spiritual adultery; question whether the next two children are really his ... you can see the decline in the relationship
- 2) symbolic only; an allegory – does not give the power to the illustration; details of the narrative read like a literal story
- 3) Gomer chaste initially – but God foretelling what her character and actions would be;

David Thompson: Frankly after carefully examining this issue in the Hebrew text and in the Greek Septuagint Greek text, I agree with **Gary Smith**, a professor of Hebrew, who has written a commentary on this book, who concludes Hosea was commanded to go and marry a woman who was paid money for sexual favors both before Hosea married

her and after he married her (**Hos. 2:5**) (*Hosea*, p. 46). As he says, “the plain meaning of these words cannot be easily escaped.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: The simplest solution to this question and the various alternatives we have cited is to take the text of Hosea as it stands. God told Hosea to take a wife of harlotry, to marry a woman who was involved in some form of prostitution and after marriage returned to her former lifestyle. It is certainly tempting to read into the text that she was a cult prostitute, even though a strong case cannot be proven from the text itself.

Alternate Interpretation:

G. Campbell Morgan: The statement distinctly calls here a **woman of whoredom**, but it does not tell us that she was that at the time. It certainly does mean that God knew the possibilities in the heart of Gomer, and that presently they would be manifested in her conduct, and knowing, He commanded Hosea to marry her, knowing also what his experience would do for him in his prophetic work. When Hosea married Gomer, she was not openly a sinning woman, and the children antedated her infidelity. The earlier life of the prophet was in all likelihood one of joy and happiness.

H. D. Beeby: Many attempts have been made to justify God’s strange command, to preserve God’s moral reputation and to make things a little easier and more presentable for Hosea. . . . Incomprehensible and unpalatable as it sounds, this is the one marriage that was made in heaven. God commands Hosea to marry the harlot because God’s word requires it and his will demands it.

Duane Garrett: We must not think of her as a prostitute in modern terms—a call girl or streetwalker—but should think of her more as an immoral girl who depended on gifts from her lovers.

Allen Guenther: Gomer brought no children with her into the marriage. The instructions and description which follow identify the children as born after the marriage.

James Mays: The marriage is an act of obedience to Yahweh’s command undertaken to dramatize the divine indictment of Israel. Hosea is to display the predicament of Yahweh in his covenant with Israel by wedding a harlotrous woman!

- b. Have Children of Harlotry
“*and have children of harlotry;*”

James Mays: That the children are **harlotrous** has nothing to do with their own character; nothing is made of them except their naming. Rather they are harlotrous because of their mother. Coming from her womb which has been devoted to the cult of Baal, they are religiously the offspring of harlotry. See ‘*sons of harlotry*’ in **2.4** as a designation of Israelites and the contextual description of their mother, Israel.

2. Justifying the Shocking Command

a. Due to Harlotry

“for the land commits flagrant harlotry,”

Picture of shame and disgrace; an ugly image

How important is faithfulness in your marriage?

b. Due to Apostasy

“forsaking the LORD.”

B. (:3) Swift Consummation

1. Beginning of Their Marriage

“So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim,”

David Thompson: Now **verse 3** opens with a Hebrew word that says, *“so he went.”* The Hebrew word means he went walking on a journey to where he would find a harlot (Ibid., p. 224). Wherever he was when God told him to do this was not the place where you would find this woman. He would have to go to a place where harlots typically were. Perhaps he had to go to a brothel or perhaps, as some have suggested, he had to go to an idolatrous temple known for idolatry and immorality.

Robin Routledge: Some have tried to attach symbolism to the names Gomer and Diblaim, but that seems unlikely. If they were symbolic, we would expect their significance to be explained, as is the case with the names of Gomer’s children. It has also been suggested that Diblaim might be a reference to Gomer’s home town, Diblathaim, in Moab (cf. **Jer. 48:22**). This too seems unlikely. It is better to take these simply as the names of the figures involved.

2. Beginning of Their Family

“and she conceived and bore him a son.”

Duane Garrett: The report of their births should not be passed over as a sad but merely incidental prologue to the actual prophecy; in a real sense, they are the prophecy, and everything else is just exposition.

II. (:4-9) SIGNIFICANT CHILDREN WITH SYMBOLIC MEANING

A. (:4-5) Reality of the Judgment -- Son = Jezreel – “God will scatter” –

1. (:4) Ending the Kingdom of Israel

*“And the LORD said to him, ‘Name him Jezreel;
for yet a little while,
and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel,
and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.’”*

Discipline and exile (**2 Kings 9:7 – 10:28**)

Look at the security we have as the church – nothing can separate us from the love of

God which is in Christ Jesus

“put an end” (:4) – exile of Israel to Assyria in 722 B.C.

Duane Garrett: [“Jezreel”] means “*May God sow*” and thus associates God with the productivity of the land. In this it addresses the fertility cults that figure so heavily in the background of the Book of Hosea. For the prophet no doubt the name contrasts Yahweh, the true giver of life, with the false fertility god Baal. We thus have in this name associations of both death by violence and of a prayer to God, the giver of bountiful harvests.

David Thompson: Now Jezreel is a very important geographical place in Israel (**I Kings 18:45-46**). This city served as a winter capital for Israel’s kings. But it is clear from these verses that God had one moment in mind in Jezreel’s history which he refers to as “the bloodshed of Jezreel.”

King Jeroboam represented the last strong king and good king in a dynasty started by Jehu (841- 814 B.C.). In the valley of Jezreel, Jehu, King of Israel (841-814 B.C.), was ordered by God to destroy the house of Ahab (**II Kings 9:7**). Jehu won a great victory totally destroying Israel’s idolatrous enemies.

Jehu ordered Queen Jezebel’s servants to kill her by throwing her out the window. Then Jehu had Ahab’s 30 sons killed and their heads brought to him in Jezreel (**II Kings 9-10**). This was all good.

But Jehu killed King Ahaziah of Judah and 42 of his relatives, which was evil (**II Kings 9:27-28; 10:12-14**). By doing this, Jehu demonstrated a great disloyalty to God by shedding that innocent blood.

Now God warned his people by naming this son Jezreel that the same kind of thing would happen to them. They were disloyal to God and they were pursuing the same kinds of things of immoral idolatry like Ahab and Jezebel.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The monarchy of Hosea’s day will suffer the same fate as that suffered by the house of Ahab and others. It will be eliminated violently by divine judgment.

J. Andrew Dearman: According to **1:4**, God will bring (lit. “*visit*” or “*inspect*”) the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu. Modern translations often render the Hebrew phrase *pāqad* ‘al here and in similar texts as “*punish*” because the action conveyed in the Lord’s visitation is understood to be judgment. This is not wrong, but the rendering misses an important nuance. God’s judgment in the coming historical process is the bringing of a negative effect on the ruling house, based on prior failures related to that dynasty.

Derek Kidner: There is a **paradox over Jehu**. Here he is a man of blood, storing up disaster for his dynasty and realm; but in **2 Kings 10:30** he has ‘*done well*’ in carrying out against the house of Ahab ‘*all that was in (God’s) heart*’. The reason is not far to seek; it lies in Jehu himself, a standing example of a human scourge. As God’s executioner he left nothing undone, and it was in that capacity that he collected his reward: the promise of the throne to four generations of his sons. The Old Testament has several instances of this kind of servant, of whom Sennacherib, whom God calls ‘*the rod of my anger*’ (‘*But he does not so intend, and his mind does not so think*’, **Is. 10:7**), and Nebuchadnezzar ‘*my servant*’ (**Je. 27:6**) are prime examples. And they were paid their wages – paid in spoil and conquest, described in exactly these terms of ‘*wages*’ in **Ezekiel 29:18-20**; but paid also with the due requital of their pride and cruelty.

So it was with Jehu – with the difference that he knew of his commission from the Lord. But there was no difference of spirit or method. The events of **2 Kings 10** are a welter of trickery, butchery and hypocrisy, in which the only trace of a religious motive is fanaticism – and even this is suspect in view of Jehu’s charade of sacrificing to Baal (**2 Ki. 10:25**). Self-interest and bloodlust were his dominant springs of conduct, and it was this that made ‘*the blood of Jezreel*’ an accusing stain.

James Limburg: At Jezreel, Jehu had killed the kings of Israel and Judah. There Jezebel had died a cruel death. It was at Jezreel that Jehu displayed the heads of the seven sons of Ahab; he had also engineered the mass extermination of Baal worshipers there (**II Kings 9–10**). Thus the name of the beautiful city and valley was forever linked with violence and mass murder. To name a child “*Jezreel*” might be like naming a child today “Auschwitz” or “Hiroshima.” An **announcement of punishment** indicates the ominous significance of the name: “*and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.*”

2. (:5) Eradicating the Military Power of Israel

*“And it will come about on that day,
that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”*

At city of Jezreel – Jehu slaughtered house of Ahab; scene of much bloodshed

Trent Butler: A quick verse summarizes God’s plan. On the day he chooses, he will shatter the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel. The bow represents the nation’s military power. Such power was focused in the king of Israel. God planned to bring an end to Israel’s army and its monarchy. This began when the last king of the Jehu dynasty—King Zechariah—met his death at the hand of Shallum. The Septuagint, the oldest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, locates this in the Valley of Jezreel (**2 Kgs. 15:10**). The completion also came in the Jezreel Valley when Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria defeated Israel’s army and took the territory of the valley (**2 Kgs. 15:29**).

B. (:6-7) Reaction to the Judgment -- Daughter = *Lo-ruhamah* – “*not pitied*” –

1. (:6) Compassion Ends for Northern Kingdom

*“Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.
And the LORD said to him, ‘Name her Lo-ruhamah,
for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel,
that I should ever forgive them.’”*

No more compassion and forgiveness.

How important for us that “*the Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness*”
(**Lam 3:22-23**)

Derek Kidner: The first child had been Hosea’s own: his wife ‘*bore him a son*’ (**3**). The second and third are not said to have been his: the ‘*him*’ of **verse 3** is missing in **verses 6 and 8**. So the joy of fatherhood was deeply clouded, and the children were living proofs of the invasion of the marriage.

Duane Garrett: [Regarding translation problems with the last phrase in the verse]
We are thus left with the astonishing possibility that the text means exactly what it says: “*I will completely forgive them.*” How is it possible that Hosea (speaking for God) could in the same breath say, “I will no longer show love to the house of Israel” and “I shall completely forgive them”? It is jolting, but it is not unusual for an author who routinely sets assertions about God’s terrible wrath directly and without transition beside statements of his absolute love.

Allen Guenther: The name *Lo-ruhamah* carries two distinct, yet related connotations. The full consequences of covenant disloyalty are about to come crashing down on the Northern kingdom, the house of Israel. *Lo-ruhamah* implies that the covenant curses are descending on Israel in all their fury to drag the nation off into exile [*Covenant*, p 379].

Second, the root *rh**m* appears in fifth-century Jewish Aramaic marriage contracts from Egypt in connection with the rights of inheritance. The noun there appears to refer to the one designated principal heir. To say that a person is *Lo-ruhamah* is to call her “Disinherited.” Since Israel was promised the land as a gift, when God calls his offspring, *Lo-ruhamah*, he indicates thereby that they will not continue to possess the Lord’s property. The two life settings of the language of compassion and inheritance, then, converge to point toward Israel’s destiny as an exiled people. . .

Translation: *Name her Not-pitied (Lo-ruhamah), because I will not longer continue to love (raham) the house of Israel, though I will forgive them. The house of Judah, however, I will love (raham), and I will rescue them by means of Yahweh their God.*

James Mays: It is the nation (house) of Israel which is left without compassion before their God. The announcement of God’s verdict in the interpretation implies that till now Israel has lived in the compassion of God; his feeling for them in the covenant bond has endured all their follies and failures. But now that fatherly indulgence is to be withdrawn. Cf. the similar statement in **2.4**, and the reversal of the name in **2.23**.

John Schultz: It is good to pause and imagine what the **emotions of Hosea** must have been when he learned that the wife he had married had become pregnant by another man and what his feelings were toward the child that was not his. And then when God told him to analyze his feelings because those were the sentiments God felt toward the people He loved. What a horrible way of entering into an intimate fellowship with God, or sharing in the sufferings of Christ! Even in a relationship of human beings, such sentiments are rarely shared, and never on such a level. In a way Hosea knew God more intimately than Moses of whom the Scripture states that God spoke to him “*face to face*.” Hosea learned to know God in the most private of all relationships, and he probably wished he had not.

2. (:7) Compassion Extended to Southern Kingdom

*“But I will have compassion on the house of Judah
and deliver them by the LORD their God,
and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen.”*

Trent Butler: God's nature contains both the holiness that destroys all sin and the love that forgives his people and renews his covenant with them.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: (The first two refer to foot soldiers, the last two to chariots.) The salvation of Yahweh, in other words, will not come by warfare. Even as judgment will come by his direct intervention, so will future blessings.

Gary Smith: This child's name reveals that God will end his tender feelings of deep affection (like a mother's deep affection for the fruit of her womb) that are foundational to his covenant relationship with his people. The loving feeling between kinfolk will be missing; God will not pity or care what happens to them. This name represents a dramatic reversal of Israel's self-understanding (they thought they were the children of God) and will be a severe blow to their confidence in God's unfailing commitment to love his people. They will no longer be rescued when they are in trouble, for God's compassionate mercy will no longer be extended to them.

C. (:8-9) Result of the Judgment -- Son = *Lo-ammi* – “*not my people*” – “*not my kin*”

*“When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son.
And the LORD said, ‘Name him Lo-ammi,
for you are not My people and I am not your God.’”*

Hosea realizes that this child was not his; God has rejected Israel;
Think of the privilege of being the people of God – do we take this for granted?

John MacArthur: The phrase gives the breaking of the covenant, a kind of divorce formula in contrast to the covenant or marriage formula.

Rom. 9:25-26 – quoted by Paul in NT

James Limburg: There is a terrifying **progression** in the sequence of these names. The first announced a future when Israel would have to live without a king, the second a future without God's compassion, and the third a future without God (cf. Jeremias).

Trent Butler: This child preached a sermon to Israel with every step he took. Israel was an illegitimate child of God, just as Not My People was an illegitimate child of Hosea.

J. Andrew Dearman: The two names, *Lo-ammi* and *Lo-ehyeh*, **both cancel a previous relationship**. This is their symmetry. On the one hand, Israel is no longer God's people, as had been proclaimed in the Sinai/Horeb covenant, predicated on Israel's response to redemption from Egypt: "*If you will keep my covenant (bĕrîtî), then you will be my special possession ... kingdom of priests ... holy nation*" (**Exod. 19:5–6**). On the other hand, God had promised to be with Moses in responding to the cries of his people, instructing Moses to tell the people that I AM had sent him to them (**Exod. 3:14**). The verbal form *'ehyeh*, "*I am*," is a pun on the personal name of God, YHWH, revealed to Moses at the burning bush. As a result of Israel's disobedience God was no longer "*I AM*" for them. The Hebrew *lō'-'ehyeh*, *Not I AM*, cancels the significance of the covenant name YHWH, rendering it null and void with respect to Israel. We might put the reversal language in the context of another polarity, that of presence and absence. Whereas *YHWH* signified his presence with Moses and the Israelites in the revealing of his name, the change to *Not I AM* represents his absence from Israel.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the most difficult thing you have ever been asked to do? Think about your choice and the outcome.
- 2) What type of mixed feelings would Hosea have had towards Gomer and her three children?
- 3) Was Gomer already a prostitute at the time of her marriage to Hosea?
- 4) What causes the Lord's patience and forbearance and compassion to come to an end?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Andrew Dearman: Perhaps it is best to see Hosea's marriage, the naming of the three children, and the acquiring of an adulteress as **public acts to illustrate a prophetic message**, with the offensiveness, indeed the impurity and scandalousness of the report (see below), as integral to the prophetic sign. The Hebrew term *'ôl* ("*sign*") is not used

to characterize these actions, but this is their function. At the same time, **Hos. 1–3** does more than simply render these acts in literary form for public consumption. Mother and children are metaphorical symbols for Israel and the land. In metaphorical terms they are the vehicle (source domain) through which to interpret the tenor (target domain) of Israel and the land in dereliction of duty. The goal, therefore, is to render Israel and the land in breach of covenant with YHWH through sign-act and literary symbol, not to provide a simple digest of family history. . .

He married a prostitute, however the term is defined; she bore three children; she and Hosea separated over her adultery; subsequently the two of them reconciled. Such a conclusion answers affirmatively one of the questions. . . : Are Gomer, the immoral mother, and the unnamed adulteress the same woman? . . . The symbolic representation of Israel is better maintained if one spouse represents the corporate identity of the people from adultery to reconciliation.

Grace Emmerson: The whole passage is a remarkable interweaving of the public and the private in its proclamation to the nation of the Lord's word by means of the prophet's personal domestic circumstances. It is reasonable to assume that this fourfold symbolic action spanned five or six years since children were customarily weaned at two or three years of age.

Duane Garrett: Hosea, having been commanded to marry an immoral woman, took Gomer as his wife. After some time and the birth of three children, she abandoned him for other lovers. Then apparently she fell into destitution. Again at God's direction Hosea went after her and found her, redeemed her (perhaps from slavery), and took her home. Proponents of this view have often regarded it as another example of a prophetic “**speech-act**” in which the prophet does something strange or shocking to carry home his message. Isaiah walked about naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of the coming exile of Egypt and Cush (**Isa 20:3–5**). Ezekiel lay on his side for over a year near a small model of Jerusalem under siege (**Ezek 4–5**); he also was forbidden to mourn when his wife died (**24:15–18**). Jeremiah did not marry (**Jer 16:2**).

While it is true that Hosea's marriage was a speech-act—indeed, it is the most extreme example in the Bible—this alone is not sufficient to explain this astonishing history.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 forbids a man to remarry his wife after a divorce if she has married another man in the interim. Although probably not technically in violation of this law, because it does not seem that she had remarried in the interim, Hosea's action of taking Gomer back pushes the envelope. If it was wrong for a man to take back a woman after she had been married to another man, what was Hosea doing taking Gomer back after she had been with countless men?

Surprisingly, however, the very offense of Hosea's action strongly confirms that this is indeed the correct interpretation. God has divorced Israel just as Hosea has divorced Gomer, but in both cases grace triumphs over righteous jealousy and the demands of the law. Like the cross itself, Hosea's action is a stumbling block. A man does not normally

take back a woman who has behaved the way Gomer did. But we must acknowledge this as a revelation of grace through suffering.

Hosea's sad story is important in another equally paradoxical way. One would think that having married an immoral woman, and then having the marriage collapse because of the wife's gross infidelity, would be enough to disqualify anyone from claiming the role of God's spokesman. But the opposite is true. Hosea offers his private tragedies as his credentials for serving as God's spokesman. As we have seen in the introduction to this commentary, Hosea and God echo one another in this book. First one speaks, and then the other. The human serves as advocate for God, but as the two speak, they speak common words from a common experience. Hosea has endured as husband the same treatment God has endured as covenant Lord of Israel. More than any other, Hosea has the right to speak in God's name. He has shared in God's experiences and therefore can speak with God's heart.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Book of Hosea alternates between severe judgment and tender mercy. Our temptation as communicators is to move quickly to the mercy passages and neglect the disturbing judgment. Our natural inclination is to respond to our listeners who are facing hard times and reach out to them with the mercy of God. In so doing, we may neglect the people whose self-satisfaction may be keeping them from God's best for their lives. Often we say to ourselves, "People already know how bad they are; they need to hear how great is God's grace." We can no longer get away with that simplistic approach to the gospel. You and I are teaching and preaching at a time that matches the spiritual conditions in Israel more than we may want to acknowledge. Our communication of assurance to those who are caught in the syndrome of self-condemnation as a result of the psychological conditioning of childhood or growing years, must be coupled with confrontation with the truth of what God demands of all His people. Persistent self-condemnation and self-complacency are both defenses against the Spirit of God and refusals to be whole. . .

The names God called Hosea to give his children not only reveal God's judgment of Israel in the eighth century B.C. but expose the progressive drift from Him in any age. That results in what Jesus called the **unforgivable sin** (see **Matt. 12:22–37**). It begins with the pride of refusing to accept our own spiritual emptiness and insulate ourselves against admitting our need. Then this pride progresses to the stage where we think we have nothing to confess. Usually we try to justify our handling of failures or inadequacies, or we blame others, life, and circumstances for our failures, or we cover our failures by trying harder to be adequate. Finally, we become **closed to God's Spirit**. We resist claiming Christ as the source of our strength for the challenges and difficulties we encounter in life.

Our first "no" to the Holy Spirit is a traumatic refusal. But after that, it becomes easier to withhold ourselves from intimate fellowship with God. Ultimately, we become self-satisfied and mediocre. We are calloused toward the ministry of the Lord's Spirit.

That is why Jesus called the unforgivable sin the **blasphemy against the Holy Spirit**. This callousness led the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day to denigrate His work by saying that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. These legalists were so insensitive to God's goodness and mercy that they were able to insult and defame God.

For us, it's possible to say "no" to God so long that we are no longer capable of saying "yes," much less receive His remedial judgment. That was the condition of the spiritual and moral life of Israel in Hosea's day. Sadly, it is no less true of our own day.

S. Lewis Johnson: When we say that Hosea is the **prophet of unconditional love**, we mean that Hosea is a prophet who proclaims that the love of God for his people is without condition. Now, when we say that, we are talking about a particular view of the grace of God. There are, as you know, from your attendance at Believers Chapel, two generally Christian approaches to the love of God. One approach is to the love of God as if the love were conditional, and the other is as if were unconditional. These are reflected in two theologically differing viewpoints. One of them states that the love of God is conditional upon the human response of the human in free will. In other words, the love of God begins by self-movement toward God, not induced by God the Holy Spirit, not brought about by God, but actually brought about in the heart of the individual response in free will.

Now that view is very loudly proclaimed in evangelicalism today; it arguably is the majority view. In the early days of evangelicalism it was not; it was regarded as heretical. But today unfortunately it's the majority view; that's conditional love, love conditioned on the human response of the human being out of his free will. Now the other viewpoint is the viewpoint that the love of God is unconditional. That is, it is brought about that an individual loves God by God. In fact, the Apostle Paul states this, I think, very plainly when in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, he talks about the good pleasure of his grace. In other words, God has in his own sovereign, good will worked in our hearts to bring him to himself. The Lord Jesus has said it so plainly, "*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him. No one can come to him except it be given him of the Father.*" **Salvation does not begin in a self-movement. It begins in the activity of the Holy Spirit**, who by his marvelous, divine unconditional grace makes the unwilling willing. So they respond in a decision of the will, but one that is provoked by the grace of God.

So when we say that Hosea is a prophet of unconditional love, to simplify it we mean simply this: **we love him because he first loved us**. Not, we love him because we first loved him, but we love him because he first loved us. The other viewpoint is just the opposite, and we want to stress that, and I think you will see that the Prophet Hosea follows unconditional love and its teaching. We love him because he first loved us.

TEXT: Hosea 1:10-11

TITLE: BLESSINGS OF MESSIANIC RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

THE FUTURE MESSIANIC RESTORATION OF ETHNIC ISRAEL WILL BE GLORIOUS AND PERMANENT

INTRODUCTION:

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Between **verses 9 and 10** lie volumes of Jewish history that fulfill the judgment of Jezreel. To the anguished cry of the ages God will in that day answer: *“I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, ‘Thou hast chastised me . . . bring me back that I may be restored, for Thou art the LORD my God’”* (**Jer. 31:18**). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Hosea is permitted to give his countrymen an outline of the events of that restoration, which he terms *“the day of Jezreel.”* Six specific blessings may be seen in these three verses:

1. national increase (**v. 10a**),
2. spiritual awakening (**v. 10b**),
3. national reunion (**v. 11a**),
4. Messianic leadership (**v. 11b**),
5. victory over foes (**v. 11c**),
6. and a complete restoration of the covenant relationship (**2:1**).

James Mays: In contrast to the judgment and rejection foretold by the names of Hosea’s children in **1.2–9**, this oracle speaks of a future when Israel’s population shall become too numerous to be counted, their relationship to God be reconstituted, the divided north and south reunite, establish one leader over them, go up from the land – all on the day of Jezreel. The description unfolds in the style of rhythmic narration, telling about the events of time quite different from the present; it evokes a picture which faith can contemplate and anticipate in the terrible contrasts of the present. . . The salvation promised in the oracle presupposes an Israel in desperate circumstances. The people are reduced in number; the covenant is abrogated; Israel and Judah are divided, without a leader, and denied the security and blessing of the promised land. All of these features correspond to elements in Hosea’s conception of Yahweh’s judgment on Israel; because with Israel’s increase they sinned the more, their growth shall cease (**4.10; 9.12, 16; 14.1**); Yahweh has abrogated the covenant (**1.9; 8.1**); the hostility between Judah and Israel is the cause of divine wrath (**5.8–14**); the blessing of the land will be denied them (**2.9, 12; 4.3**). The events of salvation follow the time of wrath. This picture of hope then offers no easy escape, but rather lifts up the eyes of those who will believe to behold the meaning and purpose of the judgment they suffer.

David Allan Hubbard: The **tone changes:** (1) Yahweh, whose commands dominated the signs in **1:2–9**, is no longer the speaker; Hosea’s prophetic voice becomes prominent; and (2) the theme turns positive, with salvation not judgment as the intended message. In the book’s basic structure announcements of judgment and promises of hope

alternate. Here the rhythm is set for the rest of the book, even though the impersonal language, devoid of the *'I wills'* of **2:14–23; 11:9; 14:4–5**, distinguishes this speech from other words of salvation in Hosea.

Allen Guenther: **Hosea 1:10-11** assures us that **the purposes of God remain intact**. God is not hamstrung by the unfaithfulness of his people. He can take even a non-people and recreate Israel from its scattered remnants. It is a people's sin that triggers judgment. Cause and effect in this process are readily understood. But what motivates such promises as those found in **verses 10-11**? Nothing of merit within a people is sufficient cause for an act of restoration. The only possible and sufficient cause lies in the character of this Deity: **God is gracious**. The sharp side-by-side presentation of judgment speech and salvation oracle poignantly emphasize God's grace as the wellspring of restoration.

Grace Emmerson: The ancient promise given to the patriarchs (e.g., **Gen 32:12**) is restated, and the symbolic names of judgment become **symbols of hope**. The expression "*the living God*" marks the contrast between Yahweh and the lifeless idols of Canaanite religion (cf. **8:5**). Jezreel ("*God sows*") becomes a shout of triumph as Israel, to continue the agricultural metaphor, "*sprouts up*" from the land (cf. **2:23**). The schism which divided north from south at the time of Solomon's death will be healed by the appointment of one leader. There is no compelling reason to deny to Hosea himself this far-sighted hope of reconciliation. The hostility between north and south which continually tore apart the people of God was alien to prophetic aspirations. The emphasis here on a leader appointed by popular acclamation (**1:11**) is explicable in view of the many violent seizures of the throne by palace revolution in Hosea's time.

I. NATIONAL INCREASE -- RESTORATION FROM SMALL REMNANT TO GREAT NUMBERS

*"Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea,
which cannot be measured or numbered"*

Robin Routledge: indicates a measureless amount (e.g. **Gen. 41:49; Josh. 11:4; Judg. 7:12; 1 Sam. 13:5; 1 Kgs 4:29**). In particular, when linked with the number of Israelites, it recalls God's promises to the patriarchs about the future size of the nation (**Gen. 22:17; 32:12**; cf. **Isa. 10:22; Jer. 33:22**). The expression here is most similar to the promise to Jacob: *'I . . . will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted'* (**Gen. 32:12**). This suggests a further link with the Jacob narrative, and points to the future revival of the nation's fortunes. Despite their present unfaithfulness, and in the face of its current historical improbability, they will become what God intended them to be.

Duane Garrett: Having stated that Israel has forfeited their status as the people of God, the text turns around without warning or transition and reaffirms the ancient covenant promise to Abraham (**Gen 22:17**). To recall this promise is to reaffirm their status as God's people. It is pointless to resist Hosea's style as incongruous or his text as in need

of repair. The sin of the people and the faithfulness of God are two realities he simply treats as equally true. The affirmation that they would become as numerous as the sand on the seashore was almost laughable in Hosea's day. **Wolff** observes that in 738 b.c., according to **2 Kgs 15:19–20**, Israel had about sixty thousand free landholders and that the nation was puny compared to the expanding Assyrian Empire. Only faith in God could foresee a reversal of this reality.

II. NATIONAL ACCEPTANCE -- RESTORATION FROM REJECTION TO ADOPTION AS SONS

*“And in the place where it is said to them, you are not My people,
It will be said to them, You are the sons of the living God”*

Robin Routledge: The expression *living God* frequently occurs in contexts which emphasize the reality of Israel's God: acting on behalf of his people (**Josh. 3:10**), challenging those who underestimate his power (**1 Sam. 17:36; 2 Kgs 19:4, 16**) or contrasting him with other gods (**Jer. 10:10**; cf. **Dan. 6:20, 26**). The term may also point to God as the one who brings life to his people (**Mays 1969: 32; Garrett 1997: 72**).

III. NATIONAL UNITY -- RESTORATION FROM SCATTERING AND DIVISION TO GATHERING TOGETHER AND UNITY

“And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together”

Gary Smith: The second promise relates to the unification of Judah and Israel (**1:11**). This rejuvenated people will be made up of two peoples who will join themselves together as one united nation, thus ending the suspicion and hatred that extended back to the original division of the nations by Jeroboam I (**1 Kings 12**) and even earlier (**2 Sam. 2:3–11; 5:1–5**).

IV. NATIONAL SUBMISSION TO MESSIANIC LEADERSHIP -- RESTORATION FROM THE LEADERSHIP OF MULTIPLE PAGAN KINGS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ONE GOOD SHEPHERD

“And they will appoint for themselves one leader”

Allen Guenther: Just as David drew together the North and South and welded them into one great nation under God, so the fourth promise marks their reunion under the new Davidic ruler (**Hos. 3:5**). While the term for *head* does not commonly refer to kings, it represents a king in **Psalms 18:43** and **Job 29:25**, and probably here.

John Goldingay: “*Head*” is most often a familial term, but in this context it may denote a **head priest** (“chief priest” is more literally “head priest”). While the head priest needs to be an Aaronide, as the king needs to be a Davidide, in neither case is there a rule about (for instance) primogeniture. So within the relevant parameters the two peoples can appoint a head who will lead them when they “*go up*” to a festival “*from*

the country,” the entire country: they will now go together to Jerusalem, even if the people continue to use sanctuaries such as Beth-el and Beer-sheba on other occasions. The implicit assurance to Ephraimites that they will be able to revert to their commitment to Jerusalem carries an implicit insistence that they must do so. “*Collect*” with the reinforcing adverb “*together*” also constrains Judahites from thinking that they can write off Ephraim. Neither nation is complete without the other. **It is together that they are the people of Yahweh.** The vision of Judah and Ephraim coming together appears in the vision of a Judahite prophet in **Ezek. 37:15–23** (cf. **48:1–35**; also **Isa. 11:12–13**; **Jer. 3:6–18**; **31:27–34**) as well as in the message of this Ephraimite prophet. The people of God are one.

Duane Garrett: Hosea believes the division of the twelve tribes into two nations to be fundamentally perverse. Israel and Judah are **one people** and should be one nation. This, along with his conviction that the house of David must lead the people, accounts for this expansion on the previous mention of Judah in the Lo-Ruhamah oracle. Curiously, Hosea says that the united nation will **appoint a leader** rather than that God would give them a leader. This should not be taken to mean that democracy will replace divine authority; rather, it stresses **unanimous spirit of the redeemed people**. The old conflict between the house of David and the kings of Israel will end. The reunification of the nation under one leader, specifically the Davidic messiah, was to become a major element of the prophetic hope. Ezekiel, in particular, would develop it (**Ezek 37:18–25**).

John Schultz: The words “*they will appoint one leader*” can, therefore, only be understood as an acceptance by the Jews of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The way in which this will occur is stated prophetically by Zechariah: “*They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.*” The **Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown** Commentary observes: “Though appointed by the Father (**Ps 2:6**), Christ is in another sense appointed as their Head by His people, when they accept and embrace Him as such.”

V. NATIONAL GLORY -- RESTORATION FROM SHAME AND DISGRACE TO BLESSING AND GLORY

“And they will go up from the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel”

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Andersen and Freedman** propose that *come up out of the land* could mean raised from death, since land can be used as a term for the underworld. They say, “Recognizing Hosea’s capacity for using language with more than one level of meaning, we suggest that the statement, ‘*And they shall come up from the land*’ has two senses, one historical (the Exodus), one eschatological (resurrection). . . . The emphasis on Yahweh as the living God thus continues.”

James Mays: The riddle in the picture lies in the sentence ‘*they shall go up from the land*’. In Hosea ‘*the land*’ is consistently the territory of Canaan, the good earth given

to Israel by Yahweh (cf. **2.21f.**; **4.3**), and could hardly denote a place of exile from which Israel shall return, as in **Ezek. 37.21ff.** The locution might mean ‘grow up’ as plants and be a play on the name ‘Jezreel’; in the time when ‘God sows’ Israel into the land again (as in **2.23**) they will grow up like flourishing plants (note **14.5ff.**) and fill the land (so most recently **Rudolph** in KAT). Or the ‘*ālā min-hā’ āreš*’ could mean ‘gain ascendancy over the land’. In this context the last is the more likely. The picture is **military** in flavour, and such a construction leads directly to the final triumphant shout: ‘*Yea, great is the day of Jezreel!*’

David Allan Hubbard: Harder to discern is the precise meaning of *and they shall go up from the land* (v. **11**).

1. First, we can read land to mean **Assyria**, the place of captivity and understand the passage to picture a return from exile there. The word *land* (Heb. ‘*āreš*’) in the singular without a modifying noun, however, is not used in the Old Testament for a foreign nation. *Land*, in our context, almost inevitably means the ‘*promised land*’, given by God as Israel’s home, so long as her covenant loyalty remained strong.
2. Second, we can read the clause *they shall go up* (Heb. ‘*lh*’) *from* as an idiom for **military conquest**, meaning ‘*they shall take possession of*’, as some scholars have done on the basis of **Exodus 1:10.12** But that reading of **Exodus 1:10** has not gained strong support.
3. Third, we can understand ‘*the land*’ as the **Underworld**, the realm of the dead (cf. **Gen. 2:6**; **Job 10:21, 22**; **Ps. 139:15**; **Isa. 44:23**) and interpret the passage as a reference to Israel’s **resurrection** from the death of captivity and judgment (cf. **Ezek. 37:1–14**, where the description of the revival of Israel’s bones is followed immediately by a prophetic sign that promises the reunion of the two kingdoms under David the king, vv. **15–28**). **Andersen** (p. 209) blends this interpretation (which he finds compatible with **Hos. 5:8 – 6:6**) with a picture of return from exile and finds such a reading in line with ‘Hosea’s capacity for using language with more than one level of meaning’.
4. Fourth, ‘*go up*’ has been translated ‘*spring up*’ (cf. **Deut. 29:23** [**Heb. v. 22**], for this sense of the Heb. ‘*lh*’), like an abundant crop bursting forth from the land. On this reading the clause in **verse 11** reaches back to the mention of Israel’s immeasurable size (v. **10**) and looks forward to God’s bountiful sowing – a time hinted in the mention of Jezreel and made explicit in the ‘*I will sow him for myself in the land*’ of **2:23**.

As different as each of these interpretations is from the others, all of them convey the same general sense: the **glory of the united people**, kindled in their splendid past, will blaze even brighter when the judgment is over and the full work of God’s restoration is underway. The climactic character of that restoration is celebrated in the exclamation with which **verse 11** closes, ‘*How great is the day, O Jezreel.*’

Allen Guenther: Or could this promise be referring to the reconquest of surrounding nations and the reestablishment of the larger Davidic empire? That empire included Edom, Moab, Ammon, Amalek, Syria, and part of Philistia (**2 Sam. 8**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: In sum, the greatness of the “*day of Jezreel*” will be the glories of the time of national renewal. In accordance with the ancient promises, Israel will increase in number in the land, enjoy once again its relationship with God, live under the rule of a future Davidic king, and flourish by Yahweh’s hand.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why must these promises refer to ethnic Israel with future fulfillment in the Messianic kingdom?
- 2) How do these verses reinforce the principle that God is able to do what seemingly looks impossible?
- 3) What blessings and privileges are associated with being sons of God?
- 4) What hope is there for people who sense that they are far off from God and presently not connected to His love and grace?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Mays: This, then, is the fascinating picture held up before the eyes of expiring Israel to lead their vision beyond the debacle which their own failure had created. Beyond judgment, the promise to the fathers shall once again work in the body of the people to multiply them with a vitality which demonstrates that they are sons of the God who lives! As one people with one head they shall again possess the land. It is not said in so many words that Yahweh will be the one who is active in all this. But the events are so patently a resumption of the old normative history of Israel’s beginnings in which Yahweh was the one at work as to leave no doubt. What once was through him, will be again. The narrative concentrates on the events themselves because in them Yahweh is manifest. To anticipate them in faith is in fact to await the personal act of Israel’s God in the midst of his people

John Goldingay: Typical of prophetic promises, these promises take up Yahweh’s fundamental and historic undertakings and reaffirm them in this new situation. They indicate that **God will never finally cast off his people**. Yahweh does not change the name of Jezreel, and he cannot get away from the fact that it means “*God sows*”;

perhaps from the beginning the names that Hosea is given for his children “carry the seed of their reversal.” Certainly for people hearing the Hosea scroll read out a couple of centuries later, they would do so. “They serve as markers pointing at the irrevocable character of the relation of these children (/Israel) to their father (/YHWH).”

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Has the fulfillment of this vision of the future already taken place? All agree that there was a measure of fulfillment in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, when many in exile returned to Palestine. Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophetic books Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi describe the experiences and expectations, as well as the frustrations, of the returnees. It is clear that they looked ahead to something grander than what they had in the land under Persian rule (**Hag 2; Zec 14**). Were these promises then fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, the Son of David, and the establishment of the Christian church? New Testament authors relate this section of Hosea to the incorporation of the Gentiles into the new people of God (**Ro 9:25–26; 1Pe 2:10**).

Evangelical theological systems differ in their interpretation of these passages. Is the language of the prophet being utilized analogically to explain the breadth of God’s people and as a type to reveal the workings of his grace, or do these verses claim that the geopolitical promises to Israel find their final realization in Jesus and in the church as the new Israel? **Is there still a national future for believing ethnic Israel?** The answers to these questions depend on whether the reader interprets these verses within an amillennial or a premillennial framework. While the former does not believe that these OT promises still await a literal fulfillment (although some amillennialists do relate them to the new heavens and earth of **Rev 21–22**), many premillennialists (especially dispensationalist premillennialists) do.

H. D. Beeby: These verses may come from a “*day of small things*”; on the other hand they may have been spoken in the midst of some of the disasters promised in **Hos. 1:2–9**. All evidence of God’s presence is absent from them, yet the words radiate joy and hope. They express a confidence so strong that they can describe what amounts to a **great reversal** of all that has been previously uttered. They look to a future relationship with God which goes beyond all Israel had even known, for Israel is to be more than just “*my people*”; they are to be “*sons of the living God*,” enjoying an **ideal unity** under a “*head*” whom they have chosen for themselves rather than under a king whom they have merely inherited. Again the promise made to the patriarchs of Israel, that they shall be “*like the sand of the sea*,” is to be fulfilled. This is more than just reversal or restoration. This utterance looks forward to the **messianic age**.

David Thompson: Now right after God has given this gloomy assessment against His family, He predicts a **glorious future** for His family. It is very clear from these verses that God will always bless Israel even though she is His messed up family:

Blessing #1 - God will bless His family numerically . **1:10a**

God made this promise to Abraham that His family would be innumerable (**Gen. 22:17; 32:12**)

Blessing #2 - God will bless His family reputationally . **1:10b**

People from all over the world will one day testify that Israel is the nation of the “*living God*.”

Blessing #3 - God will bless His family in a unified nationality . **1:11a**

What a day when God has His entire family together, both north and south.

Blessing #4 - God will bless His family with one leader politically . **1:11b**

Both Israel and Judah will have one king, no more divided kingdom.

Blessing #5 - God will bless His family in land geographically . **1:11c**

All of the Promised Land will one day belong to Israel, including the very place known as Armageddon (**Rev. 16:13-16**).

Now the big question is why would God eventually do so much for a people who have totally turned their backs on Him? Why would God do such wonderful things for Israel when she has been idolatrous and immoral? The answer is **because of His love**. As sinful as His family is, He still loves His family.

Listen; no matter how much you have messed up, you can have a covenant relationship with God. No matter what your sin or background, believe on the Lord and you will be loved forever.

Mark Perkins: There is an Israel past and an Israel future. The past Israel existed from the first Passover, ca. 1440 B.C. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The future Israel is the Israel of the tribulation and the millennium. When Hosea speaks of the **restoration of Israel**, he looks forward to the **millennium, and the rule of Jesus Christ**.

Therefore, the following interpretations apply to the last two verses:

1. The nation of Israel will be reunited with that of Judah.
2. Their population will grow by a great amount (a sign of prosperity).
3. They will obtain a new name, "*the sons of the living God*", which will reflect their fantastic relationship with Him, and his activities on their behalf.
4. They will have one leader in Jesus Christ, the greatest political leader of all time.
5. They will ascend above the earth, which is a reference to the quality of life and excellence in production that Israel will have during the millennium. It will far exceed anything before in human history. It will include brilliance in all areas of life.

This prophecy of the millennium is pertinent to the faithful of Hosea's day. It was imperative for the faithful to understand that they might not see vindication in their own time, but that there would be eternal vindication for them, and that in spite of their being witnesses to the final destruction of their nation, it had no reflection on their spiritual lives.

TEXT: Hosea 2:1-13

TITLE: *RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM OF ISRAEL AND ITS TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES*

BIG IDEA:

FORSAKING GOD CREATES A VACUUM FILLED BY SYNCRETISTIC WORSHIP THAT HAS SHAMEFUL AND DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES

INTRODUCTION:

H. D. Beeby: In Israel's state of rebellion as depicted here all the great biblical sins are comprehended and all the virtues excluded. Here are lust, apostasy, disobedience, errors of mind, distorted emotions, perverted instincts. Here are harlotry of body, mind, and soul. Here are materialism, idolatry, faithlessness, thanklessness—a life wholly and totally misdirected and willfully disoriented. Excluded from Israel's life are all the virtues that God speaks of in **vv. 19–20**: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, and knowledge of the LORD. The vignette of the prostitute who does not just stand and solicit, but who actively pursues her lovers omits nothing. Before the sin of the crucifixion there is no more full and fearsome description of mankind's turning away from God than this.

The evils and errors envisioned are not only moral, mental, emotional, political, and religious; there is a deep **theological falsity** hinted at which is to occupy the writer later in the chapter. In **ch. 1** the harlotry protested against belongs largely within the doctrine of redemption. Israel is castigated because she has rebelled against the God of the Covenant, the God who has revealed himself in her history and has continued to be active redemptively in that history. The errors in the present chapter also begin in the context of the Covenant (i.e., within “redemption”), but in **v. 5** we have clearly entered into the area of “creation.” Israel's apostasy is now closely linked with creation and the promise of nature, and her breaking of God's covenant of salvation is tied to the simple but disastrous fact that she does not know who is in charge of the heavens and the earth.

J. Andrew Dearman: The bulk of **chapter 2 (vv. 2–23; MT 25)** is comprised of two sections or panels, with the portrayal of Hosea's family in promiscuous infidelity in its first part (**vv. 2–13**), and its promised future restoration in its second part (**vv. 14–23**). These two panels are fundamentally a rehearsal of **1:2 – 2:1** (MT 3), which also portrays in two panels the family in infidelity and in restoration. . .

Verses 2–13 contain the indictment of faithless Gomer (= Israel) by an angry and anguished Hosea (= YHWH), using the children to address their mother with his words. He describes a scenario based on her past and continuing infidelities and her seeming inability to comprehend the perilousness of her situation. Judgment will come upon her for her adulteries with her lovers (= Canaanite deities).

John Goldingay: This adroit and sustained piece of rhetoric, the most elaborate in the scroll, is a reprise of **1:2b – 2:1** [3] in the form of prophecy rather than story. Yahweh

confronts Ephraim about its whoring, warns it of the action he intends to take, but promises that he will then take further action to reestablish their relationship. . .

Western readers also have to be aware of another way in which assumptions about marriage in their culture are different from those in a traditional culture. Marriage in a traditional culture is an **economic and work arrangement** (though not solely that), but its patriarchalizing can lead to a skewing of this aspect as the man gains authority over the woman and controls the family's economy. Marriage breakdown thus has significant implications for the practical position of a wife.

Lloyd Ogilvie: With that brief introduction about the historical and contemporary problem of **syncretism**, we are able to appreciate the **severity of God's judgment** of Israel's spiritual adultery in **Hosea 2:2–13**. Israel's primary relationship with God was at stake. If the passage seems harsh, we need only remember the depths of defection and degradation to which Israel had fallen. God's patience had been tried; His exasperation was acute. But He will not go back on His marriage vows to be Israel's God and to keep them as His bride/people. Again, the judgment is meant to lead to the **desired reconciliation** described in **verses 14–23**. . .

In preaching and teaching this section, I have often found it effective to begin at the end, with the poignant verse, “*Then she forgot Me’ says the LORD*” (**Hos. 2:13**). That provides an excellent focus for four major points on contemporary syncretism:

- (1) How Israel forgot God as a result of losing the conviction that God is the source, sustainer, and sovereign of all;
- (2) how we can forget God today in our worship of false gods;
- (3) how God jogs us with judgment because He will not tolerate other gods before Him; and,
- (4) how to keep a vivid awareness that God is our ultimate strength and hope through consistent repentance and daily renewal.

(:1) TRANSITION – ANTICIPATION OF ESCHATOLOGICAL RENEWAL

Duane Garrett: This verse looks both backward and forward. It is optimistic in tone and concludes the reversal of the three names. Just as Jezreel would become a name of salvation, so Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi would be transformed into “*My loved one*” (*rûḥāmā*) and “*My people*” (*‘āmmî*). On the other hand, it also looks ahead to the next verse in that it begins with an imperative and directly addresses Hosea's children. The transitional, Janus-nature of this verse binds what precedes to what follows. It is impossible to sever **chap. 2** [Hb. 2:3–25] from the Lo-Ammi oracle.

A. Confession of Israel as God's People

“*Say to your brothers, ‘Ammi,’*”

J. Andrew Dearman: *Ammi* (My People) reverses the judgment portrayed in the name of the second son, and *Ruhamah* (Mercy) is the emphatic reversal of the daughter's name.

YHWH intends to save, and the voice of siblings crying out “*mercy*” is an emphatic affirmation that YHWH intends to overcome his people’s failures.

James Mays: The imperatives of the attached verse call upon Israel to reverse the symbolic names of judgment (‘*Unpitied*’ in **1.6** and ‘*Not-my-people*’ in **1.9**) so that they became **confessions that salvation will occur**. In the light of what will happen on the day of Jezreel, the beleaguered folk can call one another (note the plural ‘*sisters*’ and ‘*brothers*’) the people of Yahweh to whom he will show his compassion. The eschatological renewal (**2.23**) must be anticipated in the very speech of the people who are to know one another in terms of what they yet shall be.

B. Confession of Israel as Pitied and Loved by God (Shown Mercy)

“and to your sisters, ‘Ruhamah.’”

H. D. Beeby: Perhaps **v. 1** provided the transfer from Hosea’s children to the children of Israel, for clearly we have moved from the particular harlotry spoken of in **ch. 1** to the **national harlotry**.

John Goldingay: The imperative and the suffixes are plural. Hosea and/or Yahweh are bidding Ephraimite men to take on their lips the words that Yahweh had previously outlawed, “*my people*” (picking up the second promise). They are also bidding Ephraimite women to take on the other outlawed expression, “*shown compassion*.”

I. (:2-5) DIVINE ACCUSATION OF INFIDELITY LEADING TO SEVERE JUDGMENT

A. (:2a) Point of Contention

*“Contend with your mother, contend,
For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband;”*

J. Andrew Dearman: The verb *rîb*, translated as *Contend* here, typically refers to contentions and struggles that surface in the public arena, where the issue of right and wrong is to be adjudicated in one way or another, rather than to private disagreements and rebukes. When employed as a noun it can mean “quarrel” or “struggle” (**Gen. 13:7**) and refer also to a legal dispute or something akin to a lawsuit (**Exod. 23:2–3, 6; Deut. 17:8; 21:5**). As a verb it can even depict a physical struggle, perhaps based on a disagreement (**Exod. 21:18**), or an argument based on a dispute (**Num. 20:3**; cf. **Hos. 4:4**). Both noun and verb are associated with representing the cause of widows who otherwise lack protectors and advocates (**Isa. 1:17, 23**). In the prophets God contends with the failures of his people by charging or indicting them with wrongdoing (**Isa. 3:13; Jer. 2:9; Mic. 6:1–2**). It is thus a term that fits with the **prophetic task**. Elsewhere Hosea preserves similar usage (**4:1; 12:2** [MT 3]).

What the children do in contending with their mother is to charge her with a breach of family integrity, namely infidelity to her husband, their father. Why the children are employed in this role is not known. Perhaps it is part of a shaming mechanism, whereby

members of a family represent its honor and the offender is humiliated by those closest to him or her. They represent “Israel” indicting Israel, and so the shaming mechanism may be a twice-wounding. It is also the case that the children represent the unfaithfulness with which their mother is charged, and there is something to be said for self-interest. Her condemnation would adversely affect them just as her restoration would impinge on their own restoration. . .

The goal of the children’s contention is that Gomer put away the signs of her infidelity. Both harlotry and adultery describe her activities, which are symbolized with her **countenance** and **between her breasts**. The language of *putting things away* has suggested to some that jewelry, clothing, perfume, or something tangible is in mind (cf. **2:13**). In the harlotry motif elsewhere, there are references to the “*forehead of a harlot*” (**Jer. 3:3**) and to details of physical appearance intended to attract lovers (**Jer. 4:30**). Perhaps jewelry or ornaments depicted fertility rituals and devotion to the cults of the Baals, or cultural markers in dress and appearance denoted a harlot. Apart from more explicit evidence, it is probably better to see the phrase as metaphorical, commanding Gomer to put aside all things that prompt or feed her infidelities.

Duane Garrett: The word is at most quasi judicial here. Hosea is not calling upon the children to testify against their mother in a trial; rather, they are to repudiate her behavior. Not every accusation is a courtroom accusation, even metaphorically; people often accuse one another of misdeeds outside courts of law. Thus *ribû* here means to “find fault with,” to “contend against,” or to “denounce.” In saying that the children must denounce their mother, Hosea is not calling on them to testify formally. He is saying that they must set themselves apart from their mother lest they suffer the same fate she does.

“*For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband*” explains why they must denounce their mother. The Israelites believed that they were God's people solely because they were Israelites. God was in covenant with this nation, and their identity as Israelites assured them of their special place before God. Now God declares that the bond between himself and their “mother” is void. Israelites can become God's people only by renouncing Israel! The identity in which they trusted had become the greatest impediment between them and God. This is as great a blow to their religious underpinnings as is John the Baptist's claim that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones (**Matt 3:9**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The words “*she is not my wife, and I am not her husband*” echo the doubly negative statement of **1:9**. Do they represent a legal divorce proceeding? This scenario is doubtful. There is no imaginary court scene, no call to witnesses, and no challenge to respond to the charges. The fact that Yahweh warns Israel in the next verse of potential punishment, later judges her, and then woos her reveals that the marriage relationship is still in place. This situation is a far cry from the most severe sentence for adultery in the law: death by stoning (**Dt 22:22–24**).

Robin Routledge: *Rebuke* translates the imperative of the Hebrew verb *rīb*, which, like the corresponding noun, may suggest a judicial setting. However, though the statement is similar to some found in the Ancient Near East in connection with formal divorce proceedings, there is little evidence that this was used in Israel (**Mays** 1969: 37–38; **Macintosh** 1997: 41; **Kelle** 2005: 54–55; **Dearman** 2010: 109–11024). Also, because the intention of the accusation here appears to be to **open the way for reconciliation**, an actual divorce seems unlikely. However, echoing the name of Gomer’s third child, Lo-Ammi, this does signal a significant breakdown in the marriage and in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people.

Jeremy Thomas: [Role of sex in the institution of marriage and how that relates to idolatry] Marriage is a relationship created by God between one man and one woman. When God did that He made man with a role and He made woman with a role, two distinct roles. Male and female have distinct functions in the plan of God and so together they complement one another. This is why one man + one man won’t work, two men don’t complement, they have the same roles and there’s no complement. So, if you distort marriage that way you’ll be lopsided. Now the way God designed man: He made him first, He made him the leader, He made man the initiator in the relationship. The woman He took out of the man. He made her the follower, He made her the **responder** in the relationship. And when these two roles are handled correctly it’s a beautiful thing. But in the fallen world here’s the problem. The woman is the responder. If she marries her man but she goes negative to her husband then a vacuum is created. She doesn’t cease to be who she is, she’s still made to respond and what will happen is she’ll begin to respond to other men. Now that’s what’s happened here. In the marriage of Hosea his wife Gomer has gone negative toward him, she’s left the house, but she can’t be something she’s not. She’s still a woman and she’s still designed to respond to a man and so she begins to respond to other men. In the analog with the nation Israel the nation had gone negative toward God but they can’t be something they are not, they cannot become non-man, they are still designed to worship and so they begin to worship Baal. That’s the link between sex and idolatry; they both play off the original design at creation. A woman was made to respond to a man and man was made to worship.

So, **verse 2** communicates a very graphic picture of what was going on. Gomer was responding to a man in sexual intercourse but it was the wrong man. By parallel the nation Israel was worshipping a god, but it was the **wrong God**. And they should stop this.

<https://storage.sermonaudio.com/com-sermonaudio-text/1018212132281.pdf?ts=1634681808>

B. (:2b-3a) Plea for Reform Reinforced by Strong Warning

*“And let her put away her harlotry from her face,
And her adultery from between her breasts,
Lest I strip her naked
And expose her as on the day when she was born.”*

Allen Guenther: Apparently the unfaithful wife bejeweled herself with a nose ring (before her face) and a necklace or pendant (between her breasts) before committing adultery. Were these a prostitute's symbols (cf. **Jer. 4:30; Ezek. 23:40**) or were they distinctive jewelry used in the worship of Baal? We lack the data to decide.

Duane Garrett: “*Face*” suggests intent and personality, and “*breasts*” by metonymy represents the body with particular emphasis on sexuality. In short, the woman is called upon to turn her whole person away from lewd and faithless behavior. She must abandon her old ways and everything that went along with them. . .

“*As on the day she was born*” connotes not just nakedness but also helplessness (cf. **Ezek 16:4–5**). The denuded land is incapable of supporting life and is deserted by those who once dwelt there. God will leave the people to their fate, and the land will revert to wilderness.

James Mays: The use of marriage as an analogy for the covenant provides a concentrated emphasis on the personal dimension, on the relation itself, which transcends the cultic and legal. This husband is not preoccupied with his legal rights to separation or the punishment of his guilty wife. He wants her back. He demands that the wife strip from herself the embellishments of her unfaithfulness as a sign that she forswears her desertion. Let her take off her ‘*harlot-marks*’ and ‘*adultery-signs*’. ‘*Harlot-marks*’ and ‘*adultery-signs*’ (abstract plurals in Hebrew) are probably pejorative names for jewelry worn in the Baal cult (cf. **v. 13**). The wife’s adultery is in fact the cult of Baal. The wife can put it away from her, if she only will!

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The “stripping” that Yahweh will perform is **agricultural**: the land will be laid waste from lack of water, one of the curses for failure to obey the covenantal obligations (**Lev 26:19–20; Dt 28:22–24**). **Uncovering** is a metaphor for arid barrenness, not the imitation of a hypothetical, abusive cultural practice.

J. Andrew Dearman: The stripping of Gomer is likely a metaphor for the humiliating punishment that Israel will suffer in the historical process rather than her literally being forced naked from the home.

Jeremy Thomas: **Spiritual Significance of Being Clothed vs. Being Stripped Naked**
There are some hints at why we wear clothes. Originally God made man naked. It says God made them naked and they were not ashamed. It wasn’t a problem at all. After the Fall something happened and they became aware of their nakedness. And their nakedness bothered them to the point they went and made clothes; they took fig leaves and covered up. Now, no animal did that. Animals run around naked all the time and never have a problem with it. So obviously there’s a difference there between man and animals. And the Bible points out that the reason man is ashamed is because of his sin. When man sinned it affected the way he looked at the human body. Now it was something he was ashamed of. We don’t know what the body looked like before the Fall, but it did look different. The Fall brought about physical changes to the human body. We don’t know all that changed but we do know that when they looked at the

body they were ashamed of it. It probably was more because of what sin did to distort the way they saw the body. But whatever all the factors were now there was shame whereas before there was not. And they wanted to cover up so they made designer clothes. Now that's physical clothing to cover physical nakedness but the Fall affected spiritually too and there was a spiritual nakedness now due to the sin problem. So there's a deeper problem being shown to us in why man wanted clothes. Man has a sin problem and he's trying to cover that up, he's embarrassed. Remember that the spiritual always finds it's analog in the physical. So when we talk about physical circumcision, for example, there's a spiritual parallel in the need for a circumcised heart. Always the spiritual mirrors the physical. It's part of the way God built into creation revelation of spiritual truths. You may not see them at first but when you do you say, aha, I always knew there was something to that. So man is also embarrassed spiritually in analog to the physical embarrassment and he wants to cover that up. So the clothing he puts on are good works - if I do enough good works God will look down at me and say, I accept you. It's always about man clothing himself. But just as Adam and Eve couldn't clothe their physical bodies properly so they couldn't clothe their spiritual bodies properly. And so the spiritual truth is that because we're sinners we need spiritual clothing and that spiritual clothing can't be supplied by us, it's got to be supplied by God. It's the clothing of God's perfect righteousness. **Clothing is a theological statement that man is in need of righteousness.** And so what is God saying about Israel? I'm going to strip you naked, I'm going to expose you, that is, I'm going to show the world your spiritually destitute, I'm going to make you a mockery before the nations. I've protected you so far, I've sheltered you; I've blessed you but no more. I'm going to strip you of all that. And the way I'm going to do that is **v 4**; I'm going to remove all blessing.

C. (:3b) Punishment Promised

*"I will also make her like a wilderness,
Make her like desert land,
And slay her with thirst."*

David Thompson: **Dying of thirst** is a horrible way to die. When water goes out of your body the cells in the body shrink. Your tongue swells, typically your kidneys shut down first. Your brain cells do not operate normally. You become very confused and ultimately you slip into a coma and die. It is a horrible way to die. God says to His own family members, if you do not turn to Me and start being faithful to Me, this is what I will permit to happen to you.

Gary Smith: This call for change is accompanied by a threat that God will bring shame on the nation and dry up the land so that there is no fertility (**2:3**). Like a dishonored husband who uncovers the nakedness of his wife, God will humiliate his people and turn their fertile farmlands into bare deserts, which produce nothing. This is another way of predicting the coming humiliation of Israel through the exile of the nation. God warns of a divine curse on the land and the removal of life-giving rain. Since Baal was the god of rain and fertility, this would be a clear sign of his powerlessness and the extreme consequences of unfaithful prostitution with other gods.

D. (:4-5) Prostitution Involves Shameful Behavior and Perverted Perspective

*“Also, I will have no compassion on her children,
Because they are children of harlotry.
For their mother has played the harlot;
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.’”*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Just in case the individuals to whom these words were addressed, “*the children of harlotry*” thought they would escape the punishment for the corporate nation, the Lord straightened them out (v. 4). Because they were *children of harlotry*, the corrupt tendencies of the nation had infected every individual to the extent that each one had endorsed and enjoyed the sinful practices of his mother. Hosea’s generation was deaf to the pleadings of Jehovah. Through years of degeneration, the people had trained themselves to respond only on a physical level. A sensual religion devoid of spirituality was all they could understand. Truly, there was no knowledge of God in the land (4:1).

David Thompson: As one commentator said, her prostitution brought her tremendous “agricultural prosperity.” Her lovers paid her well. Gomer was a prostitute because of what it got her. But what she didn’t realize is what this would ultimately get her is the judgment of God.

J. Andrew Dearman: The *lovers* are those who gave her life-sustaining commodities, those things that a cultivated land blessed by the divine world can produce for its inhabitants. This implies that the “*lovers*” here are the Baals of the Canaanite world.

Duane Garrett: Once again we face the questions about the paternity of Hosea’s children; here suspicions arise from the assertion that their mother “*conceived them in disgrace*.” Again we do not know; the verse only tells us that she was in the status of disgrace when she conceived the children, and the Israelite people are again the focus of the message. However, we should not miss the rhetorical effect of these accumulated doubts over the paternity of Hosea’s family. Just as neighbors must have asked themselves if these children could possibly be Hosea’s, so Hosea sowed doubt about Israel’s spiritual paternity—Is Yahweh really our God, or are we the children of Baal?

John Goldingay: “*Lovers*” suggests **promiscuity** (several partners) rather than simply one sexual relationship outside marriage. The plural also links with the implicit allegory. The lovers are the entities whom the children’s mother believed were givers of her everyday physical needs, bread and water, wool and flax (for making linen), olive oil and drink (in the context, “drink” will carry the same connotations as the word does in English). Yahweh is the giver of the crops. He “plainly shows that the whole order of nature . . . is in his hand.” If he does not make things grow, people have nothing to eat.

David Allan Hubbard: The participial style with which she chants the lists of gifts virtually makes her words a **hymn to the Baals** (a close parallel in a hymn to Yahweh is **Ps. 136:25**: ‘*he who gives [is giving] bread to all flesh*’). Graspingly, she has claimed all this beneficence as her own, with the Hebrew suffix my attached to every noun. A two-fold error this: credit to the wrong giver; possessiveness by a selfish recipient. Part of the threatened judgment will be God’s correction of the double error, when he takes back what is ever and rightly his (**vv. 8–9**).

II. (:6-8) DIVINE CONSEQUENCES OF SYNCRETISTIC WORSHIP

Duane Garrett: Structure of this section:

- A Sin = going after lovers for agricultural bounty (**2:5b**)
 - B Punishment = walling her in (2:6–7a)
 - C Anticipated redemption = she will seek her husband (**2:7b**)
- A’ Sin = refusal to acknowledge Yahweh as source of bounty and fertility (**2:8**)
 - B’ Punishment = she will be destitute (**2:9–12**)
- A’’ Summary of sin = devotion to Baal and to decadence (**2:13**)
 - C’ Redemption = Yahweh will draw her back and restore her (**2:14–23**)

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Verses 6-8 summarize God’s initiation of the process of punishment, the isolation of Israel from her illicit lovers.

A. (:6) Opposition and Frustration

*“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns,
And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.”*

Trent Butler: “Therefore”, when used by the prophets, should always catch our attention. God's pronouncement of judgment, his declaration of guilt and its consequences, generally follow “therefore.”

Jason Van Bommel: Why does God use the word “therefore” and not the word “but” here in **Hosea 2**? Because the Lord is telling Israel why He is being harsh to them. He wants them to know the reason for His discipline. He takes away what is precious to them so He can fill their emptiness with Himself. He wants to break them of their love for the Baals so He can replace that love with His own love.

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M. Daniel Carroll R.: This pericope is the first of three “therefore” passages. The punishment is described as Yahweh’s obstructing wayward Israel from going where it should not go—that is, on the well-worn paths leading to other gods.

Jeremy Thomas: When you see the word **thorns** you should immediately think of the curse upon nature in **Gen 3**. Thorns in Scripture are always associated with the curse of sin and its effects on nature. There were certain deleterious effects we know because of sin on both man and nature. And one of the effects on the plant kingdom was thorns.

Thorns weren't originally produced by plants. We don't know all the mechanics of how the change took place, but obviously some genetic manipulation was involved such that whatever the plant originally produced it no longer produces. And now in place of its original produce we have thorns. Thorns are a reminder that the kind of production we had before the Fall we no longer enjoy. So after the Fall there are plants that produce thorns and that's a reminder of inefficiency, lost produce, the world we live in now is not the original world. So when he says I will hedge up her way with thorns He's saying **I will now let sin's effect upon nature run its course**. Israel has enjoyed agricultural blessing, economic blessing, land blessing and now God is saying I'm going to take that away, I'm going to remove My hand of grace and I'm going to let the effects of sin on nature run their course.

H. D. Beeby: Israel is to be severely **restricted**; hedges, walls, and other limitations will imprison her. Her frantic, obsessive religiosity with all its attendant dangers is to be given no opportunity to find satisfaction. Against her will she will be compelled to live prudently and soberly.

Duane Garrett: The imagery here implies entrapment and frustration.

B. (:7a) Desperation and Futility

*“And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them;
And she will seek them, but will not find them.”*

David Allan Hubbard: The judgment (introduced by *therefore*; cf. **vv. 9, 14; 13:3**) appropriate to Israel's lustful chase is to **cut her off from her lovers** – a case of judgment by frustration (cf. **5:6**). Its purposes are positive and gracious, no matter how vexing it may have seemed to Israel:

- (1) it sought to protect her from her wanton urges which could only produce further harm for her and her children (**v. 6**); and
- (2) it was aimed so to thwart her heated pursuits of the Baals that she would change her mind and return to Yahweh (**v. 7**).

The enforced chastity, described in the thorn bushes and stone walls (cf. the firm hand that God has to keep on '*the stubborn heifer*' of **4:16**) that block the paths to the shrines and cut her off from the Baals, anticipates the period of discipline and sexual continence in the second part of action V (**3:3–4**). Yahweh's assertiveness in confining Israel and personally seeing to her discipline is seen in the '*Behold I*' with which the first clause begins and in the fact that he is the subject of the wall-building as well.

Jeremy Thomas: Now there's a problem we see right off. Why is the woman chasing after her lovers? If the woman was created to do the responding why is she doing the initiating? She's not supposed to go after men. The man is to go after the woman. So we see role reversal. This woman is chasing after all her lovers because she thinks they provide all her needs. Now transfer to the nation Israel. Who are they chasing? They're chasing Baal because they think Baal provides all their needs. . .

When the sin nature gets stuck in idolatry it's misplaced its allegiance, it's responding toward the wrong object and it thinks that to get satisfied I've got to have this object and I've just got to have it and if I don't have it I'm just going to die. That's the way the sin nature works: it just feeds and feeds and feeds off these idols and so here you can see her, and this is the second thing, she's pursuing them but she can't get satisfaction. It's all in the piel stem, very intensive search, all I can liken it to is when you've lost something that is extremely valuable and you start getting frantic, that's the picture of this woman and the nation Israel. It's a picture of desperation, she's coming apart at the seams because she thinks my lovers provided all my needs and now I can't find them. And your sin nature will always react like this when it gets cut off from what you think is providing all your needs. This is the picture of every one of us when we have **misplaced our allegiance**.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The restriction of the wife's movement has one goal in mind: to bring her to her senses so that she **returns** to her husband (**Hos. 2:7b**). This expresses a hope, not an accomplished fact or even a certain outcome.

Here Hosea introduces the term *return*, which is sometimes translated "repent" and which plays a prominent role in the book. The people are called to return to Yahweh and are rebuked for their failure to return (i.e., renounce their disobedience and seek to follow Yahweh's word again; **Hos. 6:1; 7:10, 16; 11:5; 14:1**). Because of Israel's failure to return, Yahweh will return in judgment (**2:9**), threatening the people with a return to captivity in Egypt (**8:13; 9:3**; cf. **11:5**). But beyond the discipline of judgment, there is hope that Israel will return (**3:5**).

C. (:7b-8) Expedient Decisions Based on Perverted Thinking

"Then she will say, 'I will go back to my first husband,

For it was better for me then than now!'"

For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, And lavished on her silver and gold, Which they used for Baal."

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Hos. 2:8** is poignant with irony. Israel failed to acknowledge Yahweh as the true source of sustenance and instead used Yahweh's gifts for Baal worship. This irony is true of apostasy in any age or circumstance—we use the very gifts of God as tools of resistance against Him.

David Thompson: What Gomer did not realize is that God was the One who gives all good things to His people. His people don't have to pursue sin to get them; they need to pursue Him to get them.

J. Andrew Dearman: Gomer's pursuit of her lovers will not bear the success she desires; therefore, she considers another option to attain security for herself: a return to a previous husband. In interpreting v. 7, we are better off concentrating from the outset on the relationship between Israel and God rather than seeking clues to the sequence of events in the marriage of Gomer and Hosea. The prophet confronts Israel through the symbolic depiction of a wayward spouse who now finds that she has very limited

options. What she thought was a better arrangement, namely dependence upon her lovers, has proven illusory. There are no overt indications of remorse or repentance, only that a return to her first husband would be better. Such reasoning may also imply that Israel believed that her first husband (YHWH) had previously done a substandard job of supporting his own. Perhaps Israel's move into polytheism (and the related field of international diplomacy?) was based on the logic of safety in numbers or hedging one's bets. . .

Israel is in a bad way. After seeking security through polytheism and international deals, a return to YHWH and covenant fidelity seems like a quick fix. Once a marriage or covenant had been violated, however, there were no means to restore it from the violator's side. Indeed, it would be an exceptional move from the side of the one offended to restore the prior relationship. It is, nevertheless, part of the fundamental message of the book as a whole that such matters can be healed from the side of the offended, if that party is YHWH. But it will be a painful process all the way around.

Grace Emmerson: Cut off from her lovers and their gifts, the woman in her desperation will be driven back to her "*first husband*," albeit in **self-interest**, not repentance.

Allen Guenther: Marriage documents from other Near Eastern cultures describe the husband's obligations toward his wife to consist of generous provisions of *grain*, *oil*, and *wool* (cf. **2:8**). The addition of *water* (*drink*) and *flax* (*linen*) suggest luxury (**2:5**). *Linen* is not everyday cloth. The provision of *water* constitutes a luxury in that the wife does not need to share the daily toil of drawing and carrying water from the local well. The *oil* mentioned here is identified in the marriage documents as cosmetic oil, not cooking oil. Gomer and Israel claim that Baal has truly blessed them. . .

Reconciliation between estranged marriage partners is always appropriate. No legal barrier stands in the way of reconciliation since Gomer has not married the baals; they have been *her lovers*.

James Mays: The blessings of agricultural life are viewed as the continuation of Yahweh's action in history on Israel's behalf. It is from this theology that the profound conflict between the 'lovers who gave' and 'Yahweh who gives' derives. Israel's turning to the Baals as the source of the land's produce was not merely a matter of divided loyalty. It was a denial of the whole Yahwist theology and the frustration of the contemporaneity of Yahweh's ongoing history with his people – a failure to acknowledge Yahweh himself.

Jeremy Thomas: One of the signs you want to look for, just a sign of good spiritual health is the **thankfulness barometer**. Are you thankful for your life? If you're thankful to God everything's probably alright, but if you're having real trouble being thankful that's a sign something is wrong. One of the first things to go in spiritual difficulty is thankfulness.

III. (:9-12) DETAILED PUNISHMENTS

A. (:9a) Removal of Grain and Wine

*“Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time
And My new wine in its season.”*

Robin Routledge: Because Israel has not acknowledged Yahweh’s provision, he will take it back (v. 9), in order to make the nation’s dependence on him clear. *I will take back* reads, literally, ‘*I will return [šûb] and take*’. This again plays on the word *šûb*. Yahweh’s ‘return’ in judgment is intended to bring about Israel’s ‘return’ in repentance. The repeated *my* emphasizes the divine source, and the reference to *my wool* and *my linen* contrasts with 2:5, where the same expressions are linked with gifts from Israel’s lovers. These were intended to cover Israel’s nakedness; withdrawing them will expose the nation to public shame (v. 10; cf. 2:3).

B. (:9b) Removal of Wool and Flax – Leaving Israel Exposed

“I will also take away My wool and My flax Given to cover her nakedness.”

J. Andrew Dearman: Nakedness is much more titillating than shameful in modern society, hence the popularity of revealing clothes and the appeal of nudity in pornography. Nakedness could have its erotic side in antiquity as well, but in Semitic society public displays of it were considered shameful (as is still the case in Orthodox Judaism and Islamic society). God’s judgment on Israel will expose the people shamefully to observers.

C. (:10a) Naked Exposure

“And then I will uncover her lewdness In the sight of her lovers,”

J. Andrew Dearman: The noun *nēbālâ* refers to something foolish, which may be sexual in nature (Gen. 34:7; Deut. 22:21; Judg. 19:23; 2 Sam. 13:12), but the term is not limited to that. Translations that render *nablût* as “*lewdness*” do so because of the context, and perhaps because of the verb *uncover* (*gālâ*). In any case, Gomer’s exposure is a public one with shameful consequences, indeed, life-threatening ones.

Duane Garrett: The most telling detail is the nature of the exposure in **Hos 2:10** and **Ezek 16:37–39**. Yahweh does something that no injured husband would do—he arranges for **a private showing of his naked wife before her lovers**, before the very men who made him a cuckold! Clearly, the imagery has moved out of the realm of actual Israelite customs for dealing with an adulteress and into an artificial, parabolic world in which metaphors are molded to suit the prophet’s message. The “*lovers*” are the foreign nations and their gods, and the exposure of the woman is the **abandonment of Israel to foreign domination**. The irony in the image is that one willingly strips naked in order to commit adultery. Israel once voluntarily committed adultery through reliance on foreign powers and their gods, but now she would be forcibly stripped by these same powers in conquest.

D. (:10b) No Hope of Rescue

“And no one will rescue her out of My hand.”

E. (:11) No More Celebrations and Feasts

“I will also put an end to all her gaiety, Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, And all her festal assemblies.”

Trent Butler: Worshippers of God as well as Baal celebrated agricultural festivals, thanking the god for the fertile crops and seeking to ensure that the plentiful harvest would be repeated. Israel linked these celebrations to God's great saving actions in their history, particularly the deliverance from Egypt. The Canaanite Baal worshippers linked everything to mystical rituals filled with explicit sexual activities. Israel had begun celebrating the Lord's worship times in rituals borrowed from the Canaanites. He would put a stop to this (**Isa. 1:13**).

The Lord listed the specific times of celebrations when Israel expressed their joy. The hag (yearly festivals) designated the three annual Jewish festivals (Passover, Weeks or Firstfruits, and Booths or Tabernacles) for which God required Israel to undertake a pilgrimage to the central sanctuary (**Deut. 16:16**). Each festival was tied to a particular harvest time: Passover for the spring barley harvest, Weeks for the summer wheat harvest, and Booths for the fall grape harvest. Israel assumed they would celebrate these festivals forever. God called a halt when celebration developed into sexual homage to Baal rather than memory of the Lord's great acts in Israel's history. . .

God summarized his joy-stoppage order: it will affect **all her appointed feasts**. The term referred to any agreed-upon time (**Ps. 75:2**), but it came to designate specifically Israel's times of festival observance and national assemblies (**Lev. 23:2**). God thus puts an end to Israel's chief worship occasions. **He preferred no worship to false worship.**

David Allan Hubbard: All these God-given occasions were co-opted by Israel **for her** (note the repetition of the pronouns) **pagan purposes**. The agricultural character of the pilgrimage feasts made them readily adaptable to the fertility cult whose purpose was to assure regularity of harvest and abundance of produce. The new moon and sabbath, which had counterparts in other Middle Eastern religions, may well have become corrupted by the astrological practices of Israel's neighbours as well as by the sexual rites against which Hosea inveighs.

F. (:12) Destruction of Vines and Fig Trees

“And I will destroy her vines and fig trees, Of which she said, 'These are my wages Which my lovers have given me.' And I will make them a forest, And the beasts of the field will devour them.”

Jeremy Thomas: The vines and fig trees were not your run of the mill crops. Run of the mill agriculture was sow one season reaping the next. Vine and fig tree groves take years of development; they take a tremendous amount of capital investment up front and then you have to wait years to harvest the produce. What this is saying is I'm not

going to take your vines and fig trees while they're under development, I'm going to wait till their in production and then I'm going to wipe them out. And you're going to watch in horror as all your capital disappears overnight.

John Goldingay: Vine and fig tree are key **fruit sources** (the olive is the third). The vine means wine; the fig is the chief source of sweetness. The collocation of these two also recalls the image of an ideal secure and happy life as sitting under one's vine and fig tree. Wasting them restates the warning about turning the town into a wilderness in v. 3 [5].

J. Andrew Dearman: Cultic practices associated with fertility had as their goal the increase of crops and flocks. The Canaanite deities, the Baals, were considered the masters of the fertility cycle, and in Israel's mind had provided them with needed produce. In **2:12** the produce of the land is represented more specifically as the payment from Gomer's lovers. Here the metaphor in the foreground is not marriage and covenant, but prostitution and payment. The term rendered *payment* (*'etnâ*) is unique, but it is almost certainly a variant of the term *'etnan*, which is specifically the hire of a prostitute and is also used in **Hos. 9:1**. Perhaps the variant form here in **2:12** is for assonance with the other words in context ending in -â.

The judgment is that the inhabited and cultivated land will become forest and the habitation of wild animals. This reversion of inhabited land to forest and wild animals is an image shared with other prophets and the curses of covenant disobedience in Leviticus (**26:6, 22**). Micah, for example, envisions Jerusalem as a heap of ruins and the Temple Mount a forest (**3:12**; cf. **Jer. 26:18**). Amos depicts the roar of a lion in the forest as the announcement that the animal has found prey (**3:4**). In the postjudgment reconciliation, land and animals are brought back into harmony with the larger environment and the human community (**Hos. 2:18**).

David Thompson:

Punishment #1 - God will take back His grain . **2:9a**

Punishment #2 - God will take back His new wine . **2:9b**

Punishment #3 - God will take away His wool and flax . **2:9c**

Now these were commodities that the people needed to live and survive. These things were critical to their economy. God could take them back in a couple of ways. He could allow someone to come to dominate them who would take these things away from them or He could withhold rain so that these things could not flourish.

Punishment #4 - God will completely expose her. **2:9d-10a**

In fact, all of her lovers would see that the hand of God was completely against her. This idea of completely uncovering her pictures four things:

- 1) Coming captivity in which the people would be stripped of everything;
- 2) Coming destitution in which the people are left with nothing;

- 3) Coming humiliation;
- 4) Public disgrace. God would do this to His own family.

Punishment #5 - God will make it so that no one can rescue her. **2:10b**

When God permits someone to be rescued out of sin, He is the one who permitted the rescue. Most people want to credit man, but the credit goes to God.

Punishment #6 - God will put an end to all of her gaiety and religious ceremonies. **2:11**

Do not miss what is said here, there are people who are deep in sin who go to some church and totally enjoy it. They are happy, backslapping people who never are convicted about anything. God says, "I'll put an end to that." "I'll stop them dead in their tracks."

Punishment #7 - God will destroy the vines and fig trees given to her for immoral payment. **2:12**

Israel believed that by practicing her religious stuff she was guaranteeing herself great prosperity and rewards. God says, "I'll stop it all and destroy it all. I will destroy your agriculture and I will permit the beasts of the field to devour everything."

IV. (:13) DAMNING INDICTMENT SUMMARIZED

A. Syncretistic Idolatry

*"And I will punish her for the days of the Baals
When she used to offer sacrifices to them"*

Duane Garrett: The idea is that Yahweh will turn his back on Israel just as she has turned her back on him. Yahweh, the jilted husband, will jilt desperate Israel when they call to him. It is in this sense that they will experience the "*days of the Baals*," which the text has here defined as the time when she turns from her husband to flirt with paramours.

B. Splashy Adornment

"And adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry,"

David Allan Hubbard: The use of ornamenting (cf. the bride in Isa. **61:10**) jewelry seems to connect **verse 13** with **verse 5**. Here Israel is pictured preening herself with her ring, probably of gold (**Gen. 24:22; Judg. 8:24–26**) and worn in either the nose (**Gen. 24:47; Isa. 3:21**) or ears (**Gen. 35:4; Exod. 32:2–3**, where the form is plural), and her jewelry (a similar Heb. word is used with erotic connotations in **Song 7:2**), which may have resembled the bands worn by the goddesses Ishtar and Anat which draped their torsos so as to emphasize the breasts and the pubic area (see **Andersen**, pp. 260–262 for a detailed description).

C. Spiritual Harlotry

"And follow her lovers,"

D. Shameful Apostasy

“so that she forgot Me, ’ declares the LORD.”

H. D. Beeby: In Hebrew “*remembering*” and “*knowing*” are life commitments. They describe activities, a movement—from an attitude, a disposition, a judgment—to action, to a behavior pattern. “To know” (this is very important when studying Hosea) is the same verb as “to have sex with,” that is, to relate to another not only with the mind but with the whole person: to identify with, to become at one with. When Hosea speaks of Israel’s forgetting Yahweh in v. 13, the meaning is not far removed from **divorce** or **apostasy**.

J. Andrew Dearman: **Forgetting** has the sense of not bringing into conscious thought and thus not allowing something to shape a response.

David Allan Hubbard: **To forget God** is to act as though he had never made himself known, never redeemed his people in the exodus, never provided for them in the land, or laid his gracious and constraining claims upon them.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How has syncretism crept into modern day Christian worship and experience?
- 2) What tempted Israel to pursue syncretistic worship?
- 3) How shameful and devastating are the consequences of sin – as pictured in the analogy of being stripped naked and of being laid waste as a desert land?
- 4) When do we forget to give God the credit for all blessings and to express our thanksgiving to Him?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Jeremy Thomas: [In Chaps. 1-3 of Hosea] we said the **theme** can be summarized this way, God establishes a historic parallel between His relationship with Israel and Hosea’s relationship with his wife. We said God puts his prophets in **peculiar positions** and this is one of the most peculiar. Hosea is commanded to marry a prostitute, Gomer, as a real life example of what it was like for God to be married to the spiritual prostitute Israel. This man is going to suffer publicly because of the whoring of his wife. And this is an illustration of what God suffers because of Israel’s spiritual whoring. This is one of the very explicit ways God communicated to the nation Israel; He drew people into real life situations that mirrored the situations He was dealing with. . .

God is not a robot, God is a person who responds to history in a very personal way and Hosea is going to show us what it's like for God to have to put up with a people in rebellion against His authority. And therefore, what Hosea goes through being married to a woman who is out prostituting herself mirrors what God goes through every time you and I sin. You and I become spiritual prostitutes and the way God feels about that is parallel to what a man would feel like knowing his wife is out whoring with another man. This is a principle the Lord is teaching at this point through Hosea so we see how psychologically terrorizing sin is. Sin causes tremendous emotional turmoil. Very few of us can even imagine the seriousness of sin and what the Lord faces every time we rebel. But once you do you start to realize the magnanimity of His grace in putting up with us. The point of the analogy tonight is to give us a glimpse what this man had to face with how God feels about our sin.

<https://storage.sermonaudio.com/com-sermonaudio-text/1018212132281.pdf?ts=1634681808>

John Goldingay: Yahweh is the one God, and he does not have a consort. Yet he inspires Hosea to picture him as like a husband in relation to his people, who are like his wife.

God thus takes risks in the way he inspires his servants to communicate. There is the general **risk involved in using metaphor**. Any single metaphor is bound to be narrow and can be seriously misleading; so God uses a variety of images and metaphors to do justice to “the complexity and richness of the divine-human relationship.” It is important to maintain this **diversity of metaphors** in order to realize the potentials in the richness of human experience.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Development of Syncretism

When the Israelites settled among the Canaanite people, they were inexperienced farmers. So they learned from the Canaanites. In adopting the Canaanite way of life, they observed that the people depended on their gods, particularly Baal, for the life-giving rains, produce of the earth, and reproduction in the herds. “What harm could be done by worshiping Baal along with Yahweh to ensure success and prosperity?” Israel wondered. So they, too, erected Baal shrines in their fields. (Remember that Gideon’s father had them, and Gideon was called to tear them down as his first act of obedience to the Lord God.) Gradually the people of Israel were enticed into deeper mysteries of the sensual fertility cult with the hope that they could manipulate the gods for productivity. As the years went by, they depended more and more on Baal and less and less on Yahweh. The worship of the Canaanite gods along with Yahweh became firmly entrenched. Elijah did battle with this syncretism in his famous contest with the priests of Baal (**1 Kin. 17–18**) and in his confrontation of Jezebel, who was a devotee of Baal worship. The problem of syncretism continued throughout Israel’s history; Jeremiah took great pains to establish Yahweh’s supremacy over the false gods to bring rain (**Jer. 10:11–16; 14:22; cf. 44:17–19**). **Psalms 104, 147, and 148**, among others, celebrate Yahweh’s sovereignty over the natural world.

Robin Routledge: A key indictment is that the people have failed to recognize that what they have comes from Yahweh. He is their provider, but they have not acknowledged him (v. 8); they have forgotten him (v. 13) and, instead, give credit to Baal. As a result, Yahweh will take it all back! But his action is educative, not vindictive. This is a judgment oracle and there is no reference to Yahweh's love for his wayward bride – that will come later. However, removing his provision is intended to emphasize the people's dependence on him and bring them to a place where, like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, they come to their senses and realize that they were better off at home – in this case, with their first 'husband' (v. 7).

Yahweh's willingness to wait for his bride to return highlights his patience. Sin has serious consequences, including the breakdown of relationship with God. But that breakdown is not final, and the possibility of return and reconciliation remains open. Yahweh's commitment to restoring the relationship is evident in what follows.

Matthew Black: The Empty Promises of Idols

I. The Price of Idolary (2:2-5a)

- You Could Lose Your Family (2:2)
- You Could Lose Your Money (2:3)
- You Could Lose Your Children (2:4)
- You Could Lose Your Dignity (2:5a)

II. The Power of Idolatry (2:5b-13)

- The Promise of Idols is Powerful (2:5b)
- God's Love is More Powerful than Idols (2:6-7)
- God, not idols, is the source of all our blessing (2:8)
- Idols have the power to destroy your life (2:9-13)

III. The Pathway Out of Idolatry (2:14-23)

TEXT: Hosea 2:14-23

TITLE: RESTORATION AND RENEWAL OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS WILL RESTORE AND RENEW HIS COVENANT RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL IN THE END TIMES

INTRODUCTION:

Robin Routledge: These verses emphasize Yahweh's commitment to winning back and restoring his wayward bride. In the previous sections, *Therefore* focuses on judgment. However, this passage begins with a different emphasis. Those who are alienated from God because of sin are not able, by themselves, to bring about the changes needed to put things right. However, **God is committed to restoring the relationship**, and so we see another consequence of sin: God's direct intervention to do what is necessary to make that restoration possible. We see the ultimate demonstration of that in the coming of Christ and in the cross.

Israel has lost sight of God and his provision and so has forfeited the blessings of being in relationship with him. That state, though, is not permanent. God's desire is to give back what has been lost. That includes physical well-being, renewed understanding of God and a reaffirmation of their status as his people, in a renewed covenant bond that will last forever. To do that, Yahweh will bring them back to where the relationship began and will offer a new start, with all its initial promise. As part of that renewed relationship, he will provide everything necessary to ensure its permanence. That includes bestowing qualities that are crucial to the relationship but which have hitherto been lacking. This amounts to the **spiritual renewal** of the people (cf. **Ezek. 36:26–28**).

This new relationship is noted in the New Testament. On the eve of the crucifixion, Jesus announced a '*new covenant in my blood*' (**Luke 22:20**). And, as noted on **1:10 – 2:1**, the scope has been widened beyond Israel (cf. **Rom. 9:25–26; 1 Pet. 2:10**). As a result of divine grace, the hope of future restoration and of a new relationship with God is available to all people.

H. D. Beeby: The crescendo of accusation and of threatened punishment prepares us for the third "*therefore*," but when it comes we are equally **unprepared** for what follows. Two previous "*therefores*" succeeded by two announcements of punishment have built up into an **expectation of further promised punishments**. The rhetorical device is effective. But as we proceed, expectations are shattered and in stunned silence we listen incredulously to what is said; for the "*therefore*" opens, not into diatribe and disaster, but into **grace abounding**. This grace is grace alone, wholly unconditional, so that whatever change takes place in Israel is the result of God's grace and is not its prerequisite. The change is in fact in God, and it is indeed startling! It is true that the threats of punishment in previous verses have had overtones of re-education and hoped

for reformation, and of course there is the same pattern of reversal in **ch. 1**. Nevertheless when we hear the words “*I will allure ...*” in **v. 14** we are expected to be wholly unprepared for what follows. We have been prepared to be unprepared, prepared by the “*therefores*,” prepared by the incessant “*I will, I will*” (**vv. 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13**), where each time the “*I will*” is followed by threats of disaster. Now in **v. 14**, after the third “*therefore*,” comes the expected future tense, only this time it is a future about life and not of death. But, as before, the punishment has been wholly of God’s deciding, since the reconciliation and restored covenant depend entirely upon the will and character of God.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The passage is book-ended by the reference to two valleys—Achor and Jezreel—both filled with anguishing memories of Israel’s past failures, moving metaphors of disobedience. God excavates the memories of both and expunges them with forgiveness and the promise of a new covenant and His betrothal of Israel as His bride forever. . .

The passage is filled with reversals of previous judgments, providential care, and covenant faithfulness—all parts of a new song of hope for our valley.

James Mays: The themes and metaphors formulated in **ch. 1** and in **2.2–15** reappear: the allegory of Israel as wife and Yahweh as husband, the analogy of covenant and marriage, the problem of the Baals, the fertility of the land, and the symbolic names of the children. . . There is a successive transition from one subject and metaphor to another: the end of any relation to the Baals (**vv. 16f.**), peace with nature and safety from enemies (**v. 18**), the betrothal of God and his bride (**vv. 19f.**), revival of the land’s fertility (**vv. 21f.**), reversal of the symbolic names of judgment (**v. 23**). The material is punctuated three times by the eschatological formula ‘*it will occur in that day*’ (**vv. 16, 18, 21**), and twice with the oracle formula ‘*a saying of Yahweh*’ (**vv. 16, 21**). There is a rapid change in the personal pronouns referring to Israel: ‘*you*’ (second fem. sing.) in **v. 16**, ‘*her*’ in **v. 17**, ‘*them*’ in **v. 18**, ‘*you*’ again in **vv. 19f.**, and ‘*her*’ in **v. 23**. . . [Goal =] to furnish a complete picture of the way in which Yahweh will lead Israel from her sin through judgment to a new beginning.

David Thompson: NO MATTER HOW UNFAITHFUL GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN, IN THE END THEY WILL BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND EXPERIENCE THE FULL BLESSINGS OF GOD BECAUSE GOD WILL SOVEREIGNLY CAUSE THIS TO HAPPEN BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE.

In view of the fact that God’s people were unfaithful, immoral and adulterous and not interested in obeying Him, God still promises that He will sovereignly bring her back to a right relationship with Him and bless her in the future. If ever there is a text that teaches the eternal security of the property of God, it is this one. There are eight future blessings described here:

FUTURE BLESSING #1 – God will allure His faithless harlot wife to the wilderness and speak kindly to her. **2:14**

FUTURE BLESSING #2 – God will bless her and give her the land and Israel will sing. **2:15**

FUTURE BLESSING #3 – God will be called by Israel Ishi not Baali. **2:16**

FUTURE BLESSING #4 – God will remove the name of all false religions. **2:17**

FUTURE BLESSING #5 – God will establish a peace covenant with animals and people. **2:18**

FUTURE BLESSING #6 – God will betroth Himself to Israel forever. **2:19-20**

FUTURE BLESSING #7 – God will use His heavens to bless Israel on earth. **2:21-22**

FUTURE BLESSING #8 – God Himself will put Israel into her land . **2:23**

Duane Garrett: The structure of this text is a parallel structure within an inclusio, as follows:

- A: Reversal: Wooing in the wilderness (**2:14–15**)
 - B: A new marriage covenant (**2:16–17**)
 - C: Return to Eden (**2:18**)
 - B': A new marriage covenant (**2:19–20**)
 - C': Return to Eden (**2:21–23a**)
- A': Reversal: The names of the children are changed (**2:23bc**).

By such structuring, Hosea not only unifies this text but brings about **redemption of both the mother and her children**. The mother, Israel, experiences the tender love of Yahweh and is reunited to him in an eternal covenant, whereas the children experience the security of a new Eden and have their accursed names turned into names of blessing.

I. (:14-17) RENEWAL OF MARRIAGE COMMITMENT

A. (:14) Loving Allurement of the Wayward Bride

1. Romantic Seduction

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her,”

Gary Smith: The third “*therefore*” (**2:14**) describes a dramatic new step in God’s tactics to win back his wife, Israel. Using sexual terminology, God will “*allure*” (romantically entice) Israel back to himself, a jarring and unexpected divine method of persuasion. He will speak the tender love language that the people understand, for he deeply cares for this wife who rejected him. The picture Hosea presents involves an encounter between the couple out in the desert, where they will be alone; it will be a place where they can **start over**.

James Mays: ‘*Entice*’ means to persuade irresistibly, to overwhelm the resistance and will of another. The verb is used for the seduction of a virgin (**Ex. 22.16**) and for the divine constraint which holds a prophet powerless (**Jer. 20.7**). Like a lover who plots to be alone with his beloved, Yahweh will take the woman into the wilderness.

Jeremy Thomas: But, **v 14**, note, it can’t be a total destruction. This verse denies a total extermination. The **discipline** goes far but not to extinction. And so here’s the shift. **V 13** fuming judgment, **v 14** burning love. And so we shift from the historical defeat to **future restoration** and we’ve launched forward in time and we’re looking at prophecy or eschatology; everything here’s in the future from **vv 14-23**.

2. Romantic Setting

“Bring her into the wilderness,”

James Mays: ‘*Wilderness*’ is more than a place; it is a time and situation in which the pristine relation between God and people was untarnished and Israel depended utterly on Yahweh (cf. **13.4f.**). Hosea is not the advocate of a nomadic ideal with a simple nostalgia for life away from the agricultural civilization of Palestine. As a place, the wilderness is bare and threatening (**v. 3**) but as an epoch in the history of God and Israel it represents a **point of new beginning** (cf. **Jer. 2.1–3**). In the wilderness Yahweh will ‘*make love*’ to Israel; the expression is literally ‘*speak to her heart*’, and we can feel its proper context in the speech of courtship by looking at its use in the talk of a man to a woman whose love he seeks (**Gen. 34.3; Ruth 2.13; Judg. 19.3**). Measured against Yahwism’s studied aversion for speaking of God in any sexual terms, the picture is astonishing. Yet precisely at this point the allegory is not to be taken lightly. For it is in this daring kind of portrayal that the **passion of God** becomes visible – a passion that does not hesitate at any condescension or hold back from any act for the sake of the beloved elect.

David Allan Hubbard: Intertwined with the **love language** are the **reminiscences of the exodus**: the wilderness is the site of Yahweh’s wooing, as far removed from the tree-shaded shrines of the Baals (cf. **4:13**) as it was from the brickworks of Egypt. Promises in the desert, of wedding gifts, will be repeated and transform the scenes of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan: new vineyards, blessed by Yahweh not Baal, will teem with grapes. And the Valley of Achor (‘trouble’), plagued for half a millennium by the memory of Achan’s disobedience to the command to put everything in Ai to the ban (**Josh. 7:26**), will be gifted to Israel with a new name, a new beginning: ‘*a portal* (spacious door opening) *of hope*’ (cf. **Jer. 31:17; Lam. 3:29**). For Hosea, God’s memories of the wilderness are poignant (**9:10; 13:5**). The exodus (literally ‘*her coming up*’; cf. ‘*they shall go up*’ in **1:11**) is mentioned last because it embraces the other two historical references, the wilderness wandering and the possession of Canaan, and epitomizes the divine love for Israel that was celebrated in those events.

J. Andrew Dearman: It is the intimacy and ardor of the covenant initiation and the subsequent dependence upon God that are in the foreground of the wilderness simile.

3. Romantic Speech

“And speak kindly to her.”

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Credit for this change in the position of the harlot wife belongs to the corrective force of Israel’s punishment, which has stripped away all the tantalizing allurements of the world and placed Israel in a position of isolation where she can hear only God’s voice. It is fitting that the place for that change to occur is the wilderness, where God first spoke to Israel (cf. **Ezek. 20:33-38**).

Grace Emmerson: His is the initiative, Israel’s the response (cf. **Jer 2:2**). Her story with Yahweh will have a new beginning. Israel had reached a point of no return, hence the profound insight that only by divine grace, such as Israel experienced at the time of the exodus, can the relationship be restored.

Jeremy Thomas: Listen up guys. speak kindly to her in the Hebrew says this, “*speak upon her heart*,” in other words He’s going to engrave something upon her heart. Now obviously it has to do with her deepest needs which is what you need to answer to men with your wife. With the nation Israel what are her deepest needs? What’s God going to engrave upon her heart? Turn to **Jer 31:31** for the answer.

B. (:15) Liberated Appreciation for Restored Blessings

1. Reversal of Fortunes

*“Then I will give her her vineyards from there,
And the valley of Achor as a door of hope.”*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Having the features of a “second honeymoon,” the scene in the fifteenth verse pictures a reenactment of that first entrance into the promised land. The Lord gives Israel “*her vineyards* [symbolic of renewed peace and prosperity] *from there*,” that is, from the east coming over the Jordan River. With Israel’s sin fully judged in advance, the Valley of Achor, the site of troubling for Israel when she first entered the land (**Josh. 7**), would now be a “*door of hope*” (see also **Isa. 65:10**). The joyousness of this return to the land will provoke Israel to sing the Song of Moses once again, as she did when the Lord brought her through the Red Sea (**Exod. 15:1-21**). It is interesting to note that the Song of Moses also will be sung in the Tribulation by those who overcome the Beast (**Rev. 15:2-3**).

Robin Routledge: Having brought Israel back into the desert, to where the relationship began, Yahweh will give back the vineyards that were among the blessings associated with the occupation of Canaan (cf. **Deut. 6:11**), but which had previously been laid waste (**2:12**; cf. **Deut. 28:30, 39**). The people have associated these signs of prosperity with the Baals, but Yahweh will sever that relationship (**2:6-7**; cf. **v. 17**), so that Israel will recognize the true source of blessings.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The **Valley of Achor** was seared into Israel’s national mind as a dark page in her history. And the people who heard Hosea’s prophecy knew exactly what the

Valley of Achor meant. For them it meant a terrible failure. And it is in that context that they would have heard God's analysis of their own period. They were responsible for their eighth-century Valley of Achor because of their corruption, idolatry, and rejection of God.

But in spite of all that she had done in forgetting God, He was now saying that He would transform Israel's repetition of Achan's sin into a door of hope.

Trent Butler: God will restore the vineyards he had originally turned into thickets (v. 12). The dark blot on Joshua's conquest record was the **Valley of Achor**, which separated the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (**Josh. 15:7**). There Joshua had to execute an Israelite family and bury them after they disobeyed God's rules for warfare (**Josh. 7:24–26**). Hosea joins Isaiah (**Isa. 65:10**) in promising a future for sinful Israel. The valley called "*trouble*" (**Josh. 7:25–26**) would now be called **hope**. **God had a new day and a new plan for God's people.**

2. Response of a Liberated Heart

*"And she will sing there as in the days of her youth,
As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt."*

Jeremy Thomas: I don't know why they translate this *sing*, I do understand why, but it's not sing. It's the same word used down in **verse 21-22** one, two, three, four, five times, "*respond*," see that word. It's the same word here. The nation Israel is going to respond to God. That's the role of the woman, the woman is the responder and she will respond, but this time to her right man, this time to the one who really loves her, the one who has seduced her victoriously. The love of God wins her to Himself.

C. (:16-17) Loyal Allegiance to the One True God

1. (:16) Conversion to Loyal Intimacy Rather than Syncretistic Servanthood

*"And it will come about **in that day**, ' declares the LORD,
'That you will call Me Ishi And will no longer call Me Baali. '"*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: **Verse 16** is significant for its introduction of the words "*in that day*," one of the Old Testament technical terms for the **day of the Lord**, in which Israel suffers the Tribulation, the Messiah returns to defeat the enemies of Jerusalem, and the Millennial Kingdom is established (see **Zech. 14:4-21**). Because all Israel will be saved at that time (**Rom. 11:25-26**), the Lord declares that Israel will call Him Ishi ("*my husband*") rather than Baali ("*my master, my owner, my lord*"). This declaration by the Lord will mean an end to the deadly syncretism by which Israel had combined the biblical regulations for worship with the heathen Canaanite practices.

Gary Smith: The second half of this oracle is structured around three "*in that day*" promises, which refer to events at some unknown time in the future (**2:16, 18, 21**). One is immediately struck with the total transformation of the relationship between God and his covenant people. They will relate to one another and the world around them in a

new way. Harmony, love, and the renewal of God's covenant relationship will characterize this era.

Grace Emmerson: Israel had been guilty, not of blatantly substituting Baal for Yahweh, but of undiscerning syncretism which failed to recognize the incomparability of Yahweh who, out of sheer grace, rescued them from Egypt and brought them into covenant relationship with himself. A cosmic covenant embracing the natural world and humanity is envisaged (v. 18). Free from danger, Israel will indeed "*lie down in safety.*" At last they will **know the LORD**.

2. (:17) Cancellation of All Idolatry

*"For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth,
So that they will be mentioned by their names no more."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: With Baal no longer the master of Israel, the Lord vows in **verse 17** that Israel will completely forget her fall into idolatry. As if they were undesirable words on a blackboard slate, the Lord will erase the names of the Baals from the minds and hearts of His chosen people.

Robin Routledge: In the coming era of salvation, though, all mention of Baal will be removed, and with it the possibility of worshipping anyone other than Yahweh. In the new, restored relationship, Yahweh will have no rival.

II. (:18-20) RENEWAL OF COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

A. (:18a) Covenant of Peace and Security with the Animal Kingdom

*"In that day I will also make a covenant for them
With the beasts of the field,
The birds of the sky,
And the creeping things of the ground."*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: What is announced is that the nation will be the beneficiary of a **new reality**, where they will not suffer attacks from wild animals or enemies. Each of these dimensions is comprised of three items, suggesting completeness. The language about creation follows the order of **Genesis 1:30**. A rehabilitated relationship with nature is part of the hope of the messianic age (**Isa 11:6–9; Eze 34:25**), as is the elimination of warfare (e.g., **Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3–4**). Thus, this promise represents a reversal of the threats of **2:12** and **1:4–5** (cf. v.7), respectively (cf. **Lev 26:14–33; Dt 28:25–26, 49–57**).

Trent Butler: God will restore the peace of original creation. Instruments and conduct of war will disappear, along with the names of Baal. Man and beast can lie down securely with no one to fear. The threat and punishment of **Hosea 2:12** will no longer endure. This is God's description of the life he plans for his people.

B. (:18b) Covenant of Peace and Security with Surrounding Nations

*“And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land,
And will make them lie down in safety.”*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Until the Prince of Peace conquers a world in rebellion to His authority, even the most valiant human endeavors to bring a “just and lasting peace” to the Middle East will be foiled (cf. **Jer. 6:4; 8:11, 15; Ezek. 13:10, 16; Dan. 8:25**).

David Allen Hubbard: Two specific threats of judgment are reversed here, with all the certainty of a divine covenant. The result is **complete security**:

- (1) no danger to person or crop is to be feared from wild animals, foraging birds, or poisonous reptiles (cf. **2:12**, which promised such devastation to vineyards; cf. also **Amos 5:19**); and
- (2) no military invasion will be tolerated, since the instruments of war – bow, sword and other weapons (so war, Heb. *milhāmā*, must mean here; cf. **1:7; Ps. 76:3; Isa. 3:25; 21:15**) – will be broken and removed from Israel’s land.

C. (:19-20) Covenant of Marriage Permanency and Intimate Knowledge

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Directing His attention once again to His bride, the Lord in **verses 19-20** removes the separation that had been caused by Israel’s adultery. In an act of gracious forgiveness, the Lord betroths Himself to Israel once again. By employing the term betroth (Hebrew, *aras*; literally, “*to woo a virgin*”), God reveals to Israel that He has not only forgiven the past, but has forgotten it also. The indissolubility of this marriage bond is guaranteed by each of these divine characteristics: His eternality (“*forever*”); His imputed righteousness (“*in righteousness and in justice*”); His covenant-keeping love (*chesed*, “*lovingkindness*”); His tender mercy (*ruhamah*, “*compassion*”); and His unquestionable “*faithfulness*.” When the people of Israel have received the full impact of God’s dealings with them, they will “*know the Lord*.”

H. D. Beeby: This Groom knows he can expect nothing from the bride. Realistically and honestly she is not asked to make any vows; we have retreated from the conditional covenant of Sinai to something more like the covenants with Abraham and David. Only the Groom promises, but what promises they are! Not only are they unconditional and anchored firmly in the unchanging nature of God, but they are weighted with some of the greatest themes in Scripture, themes that belong to the very essence of God.

1. (:19a) Marriage Should Be Forever

“And I will betroth you to Me forever;”

Robin Routledge: Betrothal indicates a legally binding commitment to marriage, and between the betrothal and consummation of the relationship the bride would belong to her intended husband (**Deut. 22:23–24**). This does not require that Yahweh had previously divorced Israel. Rather, it continues the idea of taking things back to where the relationship began and offering a new start. . .

Before and after the list of bridal gifts are statements of divine intent: I will betroth you to me for ever [lě'ôlām] . . . and you will acknowledge [yāda'] the Lord. Yahweh is committed to his people and offers these gifts to ensure that the renewed relationship will not fail as it did before. It will, too, be marked by a renewed knowledge of God. The term yāda' ('to know') is significant for the prophecy.⁵⁴ Here, it contrasts with Israel's failure to acknowledge Yahweh as the source of blessings (2:8; cf. 11:3) and with the indictment that Israel has forgotten Yahweh (2:13). Elsewhere, yāda' refers to sexual intimacy (e.g. Gen. 4:1), and while that is not appropriate here, it indicates the depth of the relationship. This is not increased knowledge about Yahweh, necessary as that is, but knowledge of him.

Derek Kidner: **Betrothal** also goes further than the courtship of **verse 14**, speaking of a step that was even more decisive in Israelite custom than engagement is with us. It involved handing over the bride-price to the girl's father, whose acceptance of it finalized the matter. David's betrothal to Saul's daughter, at the barbarous price demanded of him, is described in **2 Samuel 3:14** in terms which, in Hebrew, show that the five qualities listed here, ranging from 'righteousness' to 'faithfulness', are thought of as the bride-price which God, the suitor, brings with Him. The metaphor, of course, is imperfect, like the ransom metaphor of **Mark 10:45**, since there is no 'father of the bride' to receive the gift. But even in literal betrothals such a present could be passed to the bride herself to be her dowry, and certainly she is the beneficiary here.

So the promise overflows with generosity. It is all of grace, and it clothes the New Covenant in wedding garb. It makes three things very plain:

- the permanence of this union (**19a**),
- the intimacy of it (**20b**),
- and the fact that it owes everything to God.

2. (:19b-20a) Marriage Should Be Based on God's Enduring Attributes

Lloyd Ogilvie: The text provides a moving basis for an entire sermon or class on the theme of the **nature of God as the basis of hope**. The key words offer a natural progression: righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, mercy, and faithfulness. All these qualities of God are the basis of our hope.

a. (:19b) His Righteousness and Justice

"Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice,"

Robin Routledge: **Righteousness** is associated with right action within a relationship. Here, it points to what is expected of both Israel and Yahweh as part of their mutual covenant commitment. It includes legal and ethical integrity and upholding the cause of the weak in society. In accordance with this, Yahweh acts in righteousness to vindicate Israel when they are oppressed by more powerful enemies, and so the term is also associated with salvation (e.g. **Isa. 45:8; 51:5**). **Justice** is closely linked with righteousness. Yahweh loves righteousness (*šēdāqā*) and justice (**Ps. 33:5**); they form the foundation of his throne (**Pss 89:14; 97:2**) and fill Zion (**Isa. 33:5**). Justice involves

punishing the guilty, and where the term appears in Hosea it is frequently in the context of judgment (**5:1, 11; 6:5**). It also includes ensuring fairness and impartiality (e.g. **Deut. 16:18–20**) and, like righteousness, is associated with defending those who are too weak to defend themselves (e.g. **Exod. 23:6; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 72:2; Isa. 1:17**).

b. (:19c) His Lovingkindness and Compassion
“In lovingkindness and in compassion,”

Derek Kidner: The third facet, **steadfast love** (Heb. *hesed*), might be less clumsily called ‘devotion’ or ‘true love’. The older versions called it either ‘mercy’ or, beautifully, ‘lovingkindness’; but an essential part of it is the tacit recognition of an existing bond between the parties it embraces. It implies **the love and loyalty which partners in marriage or in covenant owe to one another**; so it has a special relevance to what Hosea had been denied by Gomer. God names it in **6:6** as the thing He most desires to see in us. For God’s people it sets a standard of mutual kindness and concern among themselves; but it goes further, for in **6:4** it means the love and constancy they owe to God and have so far failed to give Him. As God’s bridal gift, then, while it is first and foremost His devoted love towards His partner, we may see it also as the very response He intends to create in her.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Bible celebrates Yahweh’s **lovingkindness**. He acts kindly to maintain the relationship established by His covenants. He will remain steadfast and immovable to “*hold fast My covenant*” (**Is. 56:4, 6**). Yahweh keeps His covenant with His reliable love (**Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 1 Kin. 8:23; Ps. 89:28; 106:45**).

You will remember the deeper meaning of **mercy** from our discussion of the term in **chapter 1** of Hosea. We noted there that the word derives from the word *womb* and thus denoted parental love or sympathy, particularly for one who is weaker or in need. As with “*lovingkindness*,” mercy is demonstrated in Yahweh’s actions. He forgives individuals or the nation (**Deut. 13:17; Ps. 40:11; 51:1; 103:4**), delivers from enemies (**Ps. 25:6; 79:8; Is. 30:18**), and gives provision in the wilderness (**Is. 49:10**).

David Allen Hubbard: **Steadfast love** and **mercy** form the second pair. Steadfast love rings with the tones of covenant loyalty, describing both the attitude and the behaviour of the Lord who made a pledge to his people in full free-dom. The Hebrew *hesed* may connote God’s guidance and protection (**Exod. 15:13**), and the motive for his rescue (**Ps. 6:4**), or forgiveness (**Ps. 25:7**) or covenant-keeping (**Deut. 7:9, 12; Mic. 7:20**). Mercy glows with tenderness and compassion, especially as it shows itself to the weak, the needy, the oppressed.

c. (:20a) His Faithfulness
“And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.”

John MacArthur: Repeated 3 times, the term emphasizes the intensity of God’s restoring love for the nation. In that day, Israel will no longer be thought of as a prostitute. Israel brings nothing to the marriage; God makes all the promises and

provides all the dowry. These verses are recited by every orthodox Jew as he places the phylacteries on his hand and forehead.

Robin Routledge: **Faithfulness** has at its heart truthfulness and reliability (e.g. **Deut. 32:4; 2 Kgs 12:15; Isa. 59:4**). God and his promises are dependable, and he looks for the same faithfulness from his people (cf. **4:1**). Faithfulness is also associated with righteousness (e.g. **1 Sam. 26:23; Pss 96:13; 143:1; Isa. 11:5**) and justice (e.g. **Isa. 1:21; Jer. 5:1**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: The word “*faithfulness*” communicates Yahweh’s constancy in character and deed toward His beloved Israel. It is set in direct contrast to the unfaithfulness of the wife/Israel in Hosea’s prophecy.

Derek Kidner: Finally, **faithfulness** (Heb. *’emûnâ*). Of all qualities, this is the one most clearly lacking in a partner who has quitted. Other faults may put a marriage under strain; this one is decisive. God, of course, had been faithful all along, under endless provocation; therefore once again the betrothal gift must be not only what He Himself displays but what He will implant and cultivate within His partner.

Allen Guenther: **Faithfulness** characterizes a person of integrity. It is observed by others as consistency, trustworthiness, and firmness. These qualities surpass material goods as the greatest gifts of God. When relationships of this type prevailed in Israel, the nation enjoyed an inner cohesion and strength and preserved the essence of the covenant.

3. (:20b) Marriage Should Be Sustained by Intimate Knowledge
“Then you will know the LORD.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Knowing Yahweh** includes the recapitulation of His nature in our character. A sure sign we “know” the Lord is that we express righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, mercy, and faithfulness to Him and in our relationships with others. That begins with personal acknowledgment of Yahweh’s rule over all and devotion to Him without rival as He has revealed Himself to be (**Hos. 2:8, 13; 13:4; Jer. 10:25**). His sovereignty becomes profoundly personal in the “Thou-I” personal relationship He graciously initiates with us. . .

The Beatitudes give us a challenging inventory of the extent to which our personal experience of the attributes of God have been reproduced in our character and relationships. He describes the qualities of the blessed—the truly joyous—those who know that they have been cherished and called to know God.

III. (:21-23) RENEWAL OF CREATION DESIGN

M. Daniel Carroll R.: “*Jezreel*” no longer will carry the ominous overtones of the prophet’s firstborn son (**1:3–5**), but instead the hopeful connotations of the promises of

1:10 – 2:1 (2:1–3). The nation will be “*planted*” (זרע, the root for “Jezreel”) back in the land. The agricultural and marital reversals are expressed by negating the impact of the meaning of the names of **ch. 1**. “*No-Compassion*” will experience divine care, and “*Not-My-People*” will be welcomed anew as the chosen ones of God. The nation, in turn, will call Yahweh “*my God*.”

A. (:21-22) Renewal of Design of Earth’s Fertility

*“And it will come about in that day that I will respond,” declares the LORD.
‘I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth,
And the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine, and to the oil,
And they will respond to Jezreel.’”*

James Mays: Yahweh will initiate the process by which the blessings of a fertile land come again to his people.

Duane Garrett: “*Respond*” conveys two ideas.

- It is first of all **a positive answer to a call for help**. The people are in a desolate land and call for help, the land calls to the heavens for rain, and the heavens look to God for direction. In short, “*respond*” conveys the idea that the prayers of the people will be answered.
- Second, “*respond*” emphasizes the **power of the word of God**, the same power that acted in creation (**Gen 1**). In contrast to Baal, Yahweh does not go through some elaborate conflict with death in order to secure a harvest for his people, nor does he need to be rescued by his consort. **He simply speaks the word.**

H. Ronald Vandermeij: When Israel knows the Lord in the fullest sense of know, then the Lord will respond with all the blessings that had been promised so long ago to Abraham (see **Gen. 12:1-3; 17:2-16**). God’s response here means that the **cycle of life** is set into motion once again. The divine response to the heavens produces rain upon the earth; the response to the fertilized earth produces the staple products necessary for sustaining life (**Deut. 11:14**); and those staple products—the grain, the new wine, and the oil—in turn respond to Jezreel, the people whom God has sown into the land forever.

Gary Smith: The final “*in that day*” promises (**2:21–23**) describe the effects of this new relationship on life in this world. Once God’s people know and love him (**2:15, 20**), he can respond to their love by restoring the natural bounty and beauty of the created universe. Thus, God in his magnificent power, not Baal, will reinvigorate the heavens above so that the sky will function as it was originally designed and give rain to the ground (**2:21**). God will also empower the earth to be fertile (Baal will not do this) by responding to the rain in the way it was designed. As a result, grain, grapes, and olive oil will be produced in abundance.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Again, Yahweh clearly declares His supremacy as the source and sustainer of life. Jezreel, representing the nation, has obviously cried out for nourishment in the time of drought and agricultural privation predicted in **Hosea 2:9**.

The valley of Jezreel, before an image of rebellion, will live up to the true meaning of the name, “*God sows.*” **Verses 21–22** are Yahweh’s reaffirmation that He is creator and the sovereign over the interdependent aspects of the natural world for the production of the material needs of His people. They all belong to Him: the heavens with the sun and nourishing rain, the earth with its nutrients to enable germination and growth of the seed, and the plentiful harvest of grain, grapes, and oil. “*My Father is the husband-man,*” Jesus had to remind Israel again in His day (**John 15:1**).

B. (:23) Renewal of Design of Covenant Commitment between the Lord and His People

1. Return of God’s People to Possess the Promised Land

“And I will sow her for Myself in the land.”

Jeremy Thomas: That’s a pun on the word **Jezreel**, and this is another truth, one of those little truths that come from one little Hebrew word, but this is one of those truths that again, applies to the Christian life. Jezreel from *Yzr* which means “*to sow, to scatter*” and *el* which means “*God.*” So Jezreel means “*God sows or scatters.*” Now if I said I was going to scatter you that would be a cursing. I’d be sending you into exile and we’ve seen that meaning before in **Hos 1:4**. What was the name of that first son? Jezreel, meaning God scatters. And that’s a prophecy of the military defeat and scattering that occurred to the nation Israel in 721BC. But if I said I’m going to sow you that would be a blessing because it means I’m going to plant you in the field such that you’ll take root and flourish.

Gary Smith: God will even be the One who will plant the seeds (Jezreel meaning “*God sows*”), so there will be no doubt about the abundant results in the future (**2:22**). But the sowing of God will not be limited to just planting crops; he will also “*plant*” his people in their promised land (**2:23**). Like a good farmer, the Lord will lovingly care for his land and those who were once “*unloved.*” These will now be proudly identified as “*my people*” rather than “*not my people.*” Through his miraculous love his people will gladly say, “*You are my God.*” These confessions of commitment almost sound like the “I take you as my wife/husband” of the marriage covenant ceremony. They demonstrate that God’s beautiful plan for this world will be accomplished through his grace in spite of the present rebelliousness and unfaithfulness of his people.

2. Response of the Husband = the Lord – the Changing of the Names of the Children

a. Compassion

*“I will also have compassion on her
who had not obtained compassion,”*

b. Belonging

*“And I will say to those who were not My people,
‘You are My people!’”*

Allen Guenther: Both God's naming and renaming of persons are important. They signal ownership, dominion, or the identification of the true nature of the one being named. Israel has become a new people; the Lord is their God.

3. Reciprocal Response of the Bride = Israel

"And they will say, 'Thou art my God!'"

J. Andrew Dearman: Thus what began as a charge of infidelity, with resulting separation and punishment, is brought around to the renewal of the relationship between Gomer/Israel and Hosea/YHWH, and extending from the marriage to the fertility and the security of the land. Whatever details we can take about Gomer, Hosea, and the children from this portrayal, all are in service to the larger theme of depicting the transformed relationship YHWH will have with his household Israel. A time of restoration, renewal, and transformation is predicted and depicted. Israel, YHWH's human household, is set in a cosmic arena that also has responded to YHWH's restorative word. And none of this is predicated initially on Israel coming to its collective senses, but on God's resolve to overcome their failures and to transform them.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What can you learn about **improving your own marriage relationship** from this analogy of the human relationship to God's marriage covenant with His people?
- 2) How does God bring His **attributes** of righteousness, justice, lovingkindness, compassion and faithfulness to bear on transforming His bride into Christlikeness?
- 3) Is it our priority to truly **know the Lord** in an intimate and loyal fashion?
- 4) How does this passage support the doctrine of the **eternal security** of believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: As in **chapter 1**, here God announces that after he has punished his people for their idolatry, he will save them and restore his relationship with them. God will again lead them into the wilderness, like he did after the exodus (**2:14-15**). The Valley of Achor ("*Valley of Trouble*") refers back to Achan's sin that brought judgment on Israel as they took possession of the promised land (**Jos 7**). As the people turn from their idolatry and turn to the Lord, God promises to turn the Valley of Trouble into a symbol of hope (**Hos 2:15**). God will make a covenant with animal life and banish warfare so that God's people might live safely in the land (**v. 18**). It will be a return to the pre-fall garden paradise (see the hope of new creation in **Isa 65:25**). God will

renew the marriage relationship in accordance with his character (**Hos 2:19-20**). His faithfulness is an expression of his dependability, in contrast to the unfaithfulness of Israel and Gomer. Through God's action, his people will acknowledge him (**2:20**). God will also open a floodgate for blessings to flow. Fertility and agricultural abundance will be restored to the land so that his people might flourish (**vv. 21-22**). As in the end of **chapter 1**, the judgment laden names of Gomer's children are reversed to blessing, and the people are promised a new covenant relationship with the Lord (cf. **Jer 30:22**).

Allen Guenther: Restoration to favor leads to restoration of the promises. The curses have matured into judgments which exiled Israel from the land of plenty. God's word of promise will restore the land to Israel. It will release the flow of milk and honey, the abundance of olive trees and vineyards (cf. **Exod. 3:8, 17; Josh. 24:13**), as witnessed by the twelve spies when they traversed the country (**Num. 13:23-28**). Unfortunately, that initial promise was received only through the pain brought on by disobedience and defeat. Achan and his family were stoned in the Valley of Achor, meaning trouble (**Josh. 7:24-26**). The future fulfillment of the promise will restore Israel without such an experience of trouble. The Valley of Achor will open the door into the Judean foothills. Jubilation in victory over their enemies will replace the despair of defeat. Trouble will turn into hope; the restoration will exceed their wildest dreams and their most glorious past experiences.

Duane Garrett: Excursus: The Ideal of the Wilderness

Yahweh threatens to turn Israel into a wilderness (**Hos 2:3**) but then promises to allure Israel into the wilderness and there win her love (**2:14**). In this, the text of Hosea draws together two theological concepts that are founded on the idea of wilderness. Ancient Israel sat precariously at the edge of a great desert, and this neighboring, hostile world so impressed itself on the minds of the inhabitants that the prophets and other biblical writers repeatedly returned to the ideal of wilderness in order to present the great themes of the Bible.

The basic and most obvious fact about the desert is that it is **hostile to human and most other forms of life**. It represents, in a sense, the lifeless chaos that existed prior to God's creative work (**Gen 1:2**). **Job 38:26-27** speaks of the wilderness as a "*desert wasteland*" and a place "*where no man lives*." For this reason the desert could toughen a person while at the same time making him to be an outcast. Ishmael was a man of the wilderness; he was both adept at survival and lived apart from all ordinary people (**Gen 16:7-12; 21:14-21**). For the average person wilderness was something to avoid. The Israelites of the exodus complained that they would have preferred to have died in Egypt than to suffer in the wilderness (**Exod 14:12**; see also **Prov 21:19**). **The wilderness stands in contrast to the city, the place of human habitation.**

For this reason the wilderness is the **place of punishment**, and the archetype for this ideal is the forty years of wandering Israel suffered as punishment for lack of obedience (**Num 32:13**). **Ezekiel 29:5** (here speaking against Egypt) portrays abandonment in the wilderness in terms that bring out what a fearful place it was: "*I will leave you in the*

desert, you and all the fish of your streams. You will fall on the open field and not be gathered or picked up. I will give you as food to the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air.”

Frequently the prophets used the image of reversion to wilderness to describe God's rejection of a city. **Isaiah 27:10** is typical: *“The fortified city stands desolate, an abandoned settlement, forsaken like the desert; there the calves graze, there they lie down; they strip its branches bare.”* Jeremiah's vision of Yahweh's wrath was similar: *“I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger”* (**Jer 4:26**). **Joel 2:3**, speaking of the northern army, has a similar theme: *“Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them”* (see also **Isa 14:17; 33:9; 64:10; Jer 22:6; 50:12; 51:43; and Mal 1:3**).

By contrast the prophets promise that **God will fructify the wilderness in the eschatological salvation**. **Isaiah 32:14–17** gives the most complete statement of this aspect of Israel's hope. . .

None of this implies that the Old Testament uniformly treats the wilderness as evil. One could more accurately say that it portrays the desert as **harsh and dangerous**. The wilderness **forces the individual to rely upon God**, and the Bible often attributes survival in the wilderness to his grace. The archetype here is the feeding of the nation with manna (**Exod 16:11–16**), when Yahweh miraculously sustained Israel in the wilderness. One sees reflections of this throughout the Old Testament. An example is **Jer 2:6**: *“They did not say, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?’ ”* (see also **Deut 8:15–16**). **Hosea 13:5** alludes to this tradition. In fact, so great was Yahweh's ability to protect his people from the rigors of the wilderness that even their clothes did not wear out (**Deut 29:5**). When Jesus fed the four thousand in the wilderness (**Matt 15:33–34**), he demonstrated that he possessed the power of the God of the exodus.

Because God is able to sustain his people in the wilderness, it is also a **place of sanctuary in times of danger**. David retreated to the wilderness when pursued by his enemies (e.g., **1 Sam 23:14**). Elijah was sustained by ravens at the Wadi Kerith (**1 Kgs 17:4–6**). **Psalms 55:6–8** reflects this longing for the security of the wilderness. . .

As a place of refuge it is also a place where **one learns complete reliance on God**. The wilderness is therefore also the place of testing, repentance, and spiritual growth. **Deuteronomy 8:2** declares that God left Israel in the wilderness for forty years *“in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments.”* Thus the time of Israel's punishment was redeemed in that it became a time of cleansing and renewal, and **Jer 2:2** remembers it not as a time of apostasy but of special devotion to Yahweh. John the Baptist, fulfilling **Isa 40:3**, preached the message of repentance from the wilderness (**Matt 3:1–3**). Jesus, moreover, had to confront temptation in the wilderness as the final act of preparation

for his ministry (**Matt 4**), perhaps because it was there he especially confronted the weakness of what it means to be human. Paul also appears to have spent time in the wilderness prior to his missionary work (**Gal 1:17**).

The wilderness is therefore the **place for encountering God**, albeit that encounter might involve wrestling with the devil as well. Jacob, alone in the night on the other side of the Jordan, wrestled with the Angel of the Lord (**Gen 32:24–31**). It was there that Moses saw his great vision at the burning bush (**Exod 3**) and there that Israel met God and received the Torah (**Exod 19–20**). In the wilderness Elijah had his greatest encounter with the word of God (**1 Kgs 19:10–18**). Hosea draws upon this idea in **2:14**, where God promises to come to his people in the wilderness. . .

The wilderness is therefore a threat to life and is the opposite of the subdued land, the city. It can represent rejection by God, and the eternal peace of God will mean an end to wilderness. But it is also the place of abandoning the world, wealth, and pretense and of depending entirely upon God for life. It is thus the place of grace and the training ground of spirituality. It is no surprise that Christians through the centuries have sought out the desert as the place to learn discipleship and to meet God. Israel, separated from Baal, the nations, and the material allurements of the city, can find herself again in the wilderness.

Jason Van Bommel: How Much Does the Lord Love His People?

The depth of God's love is measured not just in how much good He is committed to doing for us, but also in how much we utterly don't deserve such goodness and in how much it cost Him to be so good to us. We deserve to be named No Mercy and Not My People. We deserve to be cut off and thrown away for what we have done. Yet God gave His Son in our place, the highest and best price, the most unbelievably costly sacrifice, to clear the way for His goodness and His love to win the day in the end.

Jeremy Thomas: We've seen, in summary, that at the middle of the Tribulation the Lord will start to seduce His wife Israel. She has been unfaithful but He will have forgiven her for all her prostitutions and He'll start to seduce her. The first thing He'll do is take her away into the wilderness so they can be alone. For one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Second, He'll engrave His word on her heart. And third, He'll bring her back into the land, He'll complete the conquest and give her peace and security in the land. Then she'll respond to Him showing His seduction was successful and when she affectionately regards YHWH as her husband He'll remove all idolatry from her. The right man and the right woman will be together forever in love. And this is, therefore, another passage on premillennialism, premillennialism being the picture that Christ comes back and restores Israel's kingdom on earth. . .

Now the question is **when** is this [New Covenant] fulfilled. We know it was scheduled to be fulfilled in the 1st century on the **Day of Pentecost**. . . Jesus is the Firstfruits of the resurrection and therefore the guarantee that more would be resurrected on the Feast of Pentecost. The Feast of Pentecost came fifty days later. And so obviously when the Day of Pentecost arrives in **Acts 2**, everything was happening right on schedule. The

Feast of Passover has been literally fulfilled in Jesus' death, the Feast of Firstfruits has been literally fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection and now in **Acts 2** the Holy Spirit arrives right on schedule for the resurrection of the Jewish nation. **Problem: the nation Israel is still in rebellion.** So it's as if God's plan is trucking along at 90 miles per hour and the whole thing comes to a halt in **Acts 2**. The Spirit arrives right on schedule and the New Covenant could be fulfilled and **Joel 2** come to pass but the nation is not ready, they have rejected their Messiah, Jesus. So what **Joel 2** prophecies would happen doesn't happen. **Joel 2** says the sun would be darkened, the moon turned to blood and there would be cosmic disturbances. And yet none of that happened in **Acts 2**. The thing that happened in **Acts 2** was **tongues** and Joel doesn't even talk about tongues. Isaiah talks about tongues and tongues were a **sign of judgment on the nation**. When they heard the Hebrew truths in the Gentile languages which is what they heard, they should have known uh oh, we're in trouble. Because Isaiah said when you hear that you better know that the fifth degree of discipline is on the horizon, you're going to be disciplined severely. Tongues was never a sign of blessing, it was always a sign of cursing. And that's why Peter makes such a passionate appeal to his country in **Acts 2** and **3**: oh, Israel, if you would receive Jesus the Nazarene as your Messiah, if you'll repent and return to Him then your kingdom will come and all this disaster predicted by the prophet Isaiah will be avoided. But the nation said, no, we don't want Jesus to rule over us, we want Caesar to rule over us. And boy did they ever get Caesar in AD70. The armies of Rome crushed them and sent them in exile to the four corners of the globe.

TEXT: Hosea 3:1-5

TITLE: LOYAL LOVE DEMONSTRATED IN RENEWAL OF HOSEA'S MARRIAGE

BIG IDEA:

THE INEXPLICABLE LOVE OF GOD PERSISTS IN RECOVERING HIS PEOPLE INTO COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: This short narrative describes God's plans for restoring the relationship between Hosea and his wife (3:1–3) and between himself and his people (3:4–5). In contrast to **chapter 1**, which is a third-person account about Hosea's family, this story is told in the first-person singular. The unnamed "woman" in 3:1–3 is most likely Gomer, and the restoration mentioned here happens after **chapter 1**. These events are a symbolic lesson to Hosea's audience that **God's marvelous love will surely bring about a restoration of his covenant relationship with his people. . .**

God loved his people when they were few in number (**Deut. 7:7–8**), and he graciously gave them the land of Israel in spite of their stubbornness (9:4–6). His acts of love were regulated by his choices (7:7), his promises (7:8; 9:5), and his faithfulness to his covenant (7:9). God did not base his love on Israel's goodness or acceptance of a few religious ceremonies. Rather, it was a spontaneous force that has no justification or rationale; it is an **inexplicable mystery** whereby God relates his grace, compassion, and commitment to people. **First John 4:16** simply summarizes this point by saying that "*God is love.*"

God's love is seen in **the way he acts toward people**. In this case he does not deal with Israel based on justice, but on the basis of undeserved love. His love is not blind, however; he knows when his people do not love him, and he makes every attempt to restore the love relationship between himself and his people. One method in the process of restoration is for people to humble themselves, confess their sins, and seek God's face for forgiveness (**2 Chron. 7:14**). God can also draw his people back to himself through chastening (**Amos 4:6–13**) or severe punishment (**Ezek. 5–7**). In Hosea, God encourages restoration by removing those stumbling blocks (evil kings and priests) that have caused his people not to love him with all their heart.

The final way in which God's love will be demonstrated is through the granting of the nation's great messianic hopes and dreams (**Hos. 3:5**). The king from the line of David will reign in the last days (**2 Sam. 7**), and God will pour out his covenant blessings with abundance. This picture adds to the wonderful eschatological picture already presented in **Hos. 1:10–11** and **2:16–23**.

Grace Emmerson: Whereas the first symbolic action [**chap. 1**] represented Israel's unfaithfulness, this second symbolic act represents the **persistence of Yahweh's love** in the face of rejection. . . Whereas the symbolic acts of **ch. 1** signified the ultimate

rupture of the covenant relationship (1:9), the present chapter offers the prospect of a return to the LORD and to his goodness.

Trent Butler: In spite of much scholarly debate on the relationships between **chapter 1** and **chapter 3**, the best solution is to see God calling on his prophet to **restore his marriage to an unfaithful wife**. Gomer must be brought back into the prophet's house even though she was loved by Hosea's neighbor or companion (NIV *another*). Hosea must accept back into his arms his adulterous wife. Only in this way could the prophet demonstrate how the LORD loves the Israelites. Israel must see that their sins were as rotten in God's eyes as Gomer's adultery was in Hosea's. In fact, Israel's spiritual adultery with other gods was worse than Gomer's physical adultery.

H. D. Beeby: I have already said that I consider **ch. 3** continuous with **ch. 1**. This effectively rules out the theory that the happenings of **3:1–3** are to be identified with **ch. 1** and that this is the original marriage as Hosea once told it. Yet the question remains open as to whether the woman of **ch. 3** is Gomer or a second harlot. Certainty is impossible, but I assume the woman to be Gomer, because in the parallel marriage of God and Israel remains the continuing factor. The introduction into Hosea's story of a second female makes little sense.

David Thompson: IN THE END, GOD WILL GO GET HIS IDOLATROUS, IMMORAL AND WAYWARD FAMILY AND BRING THEM BACK TO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM BECAUSE HE LOVES THEM.

One of the things that we clearly see from this text is that even though we don't deserve God's love and even though we cannot earn God's love and even though we do not merit God's love, when we are in a covenant relationship with God, He loves us anyway.

Duane Garrett: GOMER'S RESTORATION (3:1–5)

Yahweh's Command (3:1)

Hosea's Response (3:2–3)

Explanation: Punishment and Reversal (3:4–5)

Allen Guenther:

I. Love Breaks Deadlocks, **3:1-3**

3:1 Go, Remarry Your Ex

3:2-3 Taking the Initiative

II. What Else Shall We Expect? **3:4-5**

3:4 Restoring Trust Takes Time

3:5 The Result Is Worth It All

I. (:1-2) SHOCKING PERSISTENCE OF GOD'S LOVE

H. D. Beeby: What is quite certain in **3:1** is that the same Hebrew root for “love” is used four times. This is the earliest reference in the OT to the love of God; moreover, the love that is called for from Hosea is a reflection of the love God has for Israel. In fact God’s love dominates the chapter.

A. (:1a) The Command to Hosea to Love Gomer Despite Adultery – God’s Persistent Love Overcomes Spiritual Adultery

“Then the LORD said to me,

‘Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress,’”

Picture of buying slave out of market place – cf. redemption.

Need to reflect on the amazing love that God has for His people; loyal love;

How can people say in light of this that God has completely cast away His people the Jewish nation because of their apostasy? Replaced by the church when it comes to OT promises? This book of Hosea is A powerful refutation and support of the dispensational position

Jeremy Thomas: The original Hebrew says this, *“Go again, love a woman continually loved by a friend,”* and the friend is Hosea and this uncovers a tremendous revelation of the love of Hosea for Gomer and by parallel God’s love for believers. The words *loved by a friend* are in the participial form and the participial form in the Hebrew means **continuous action**. They show you that Hosea was one of the greatest husbands ever to walk the planet. Because despite what has happened in the marriage, despite the fact she’s gone negative volition to him and exchanged him for other men, Hosea still loves her. This is why he was one of the most phenomenal men of history. If you want an expert on marriage it’s Hosea. He’s constantly loving his wife even though she’s not responding to him. She was constantly being loved, it’s very strong in the Hebrew that though they were physically separated Hosea loved her the whole time she was committing adultery. And the adulteress there is also in the participial form, constant action. So you have two participles and they’re put together with a tremendous conjunction of contrast between the two. On one hand that woman is constantly committing adultery after adultery after adultery and Hosea is loving her, loving her, loving her and now though they’ve been apart for years he’s to go finally and retrieve her, bring her back to himself. Hosea is going to illustrate the boundless love of God for his people Israel.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Now try to imagine the consternation and utter astonishment Hosea must have felt when Yahweh commanded, “Go again, love this woman.” The very idea sent shock waves through the prophet’s heart. On the personal level, it meant vulnerability to be hurt again; on a religious level it meant the reversal of his justified condemnation of one who had become an anathema of all he believed as a prophet of Israel. How could Hosea do it?

Duane Garrett: We still have to ask, however, why Hosea describes Gomer in anonymous terms, not to defend our conclusion that this woman is Gomer but as a simple matter of exegesis. The answer seems to be that she has forfeited her identity through her adultery. She can no longer claim the title “*wife of Hosea*” just as Israel can no longer claim the title “*people of God*.” Israel in apostasy is not Israel. By analogy adultery does not enhance a person's identity; it destroys it. . .

The command “*love a woman*,” in contrast to “*take a wife*” (1:2), implies that the woman he is to love already is his wife. She has forfeited her right to his love, but he is to give it anyway, just as Yahweh will again show love to Israel. Also, the phrase “*loved by another*” does not mean that some other man is in love with her; it simply means that she has had sexual encounters with other men.

David Allen Hubbard: Apparently her promiscuity has focused at this point on one person, called in **verse 1** by the Hebrew word usually translated ‘*friend*’ (*rēa*‘; cf. **Song 5:16**, ‘*lover*’; **Jer. 3:1**, ‘*paramours*’; **Jer. 3:20**, ‘*husband*’).

Derek Kidner: It had been no isolated lapse but a desertion which added a continuing insult to the injury. The love that was asked of him would be heroic – but that was the point, for it was to be God’s love in miniature.

B. (:1b) The Analogy Relating to God and Israel -- Man’s Faithlessness Cannot Exterminate the Persistent Love of God

*“even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel,
though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: **Raisin cakes** were associated with some religious rituals (cf. **Jer 7:18; 44:19**), so the syncretism of Israel is reiterated.

J. Andrew Dearman: The context of **Hos. 3:1** implies idolatry, as if such cakes illustrate the turning to other deities opposed by the prophet. There is scattered evidence for baked goods as religious symbols, which would support this interpretation for **Hos. 3:1**. For example, Jeremiah’s critique of his contemporaries includes reference to baked goods of a certain type (shape?) intended to honor the goddess known as the Queen of Heaven. Some interpreters have also suggested that the cakes were understood in the culture of the day to be an aphrodisiac.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Like the woman Gomer, Israel had not returned that love, but had instead devoted herself to other gods and to “*raisin cakes*.” Raisin cakes, sweetmeats made of pressed grapes, were symbolic of Israel’s rebellion against the simplicity of her faith. Raisin cakes were an integral part of the ceremony in many Canaanite cultic festivals, including the ritual that honored the “*queen of heaven*” (**Jer. 7:18; 44:19**). Truly, the exchange of God’s way for the allurements of pagan customs grieved the heart of the Almighty in Hosea’s day, just as it did when the church of the Middle Ages submerged the truth of the gospel under a multitude of pagan doctrines.

(Especially note the similarity of the cult of Mary to the ancient “*queen of heaven*” concept.)

David Thompson: How many times have we sold out our commitment to God for raisin cakes? **Dr. S. Lewis Johnson** said there is “hardly any one of us who could not look at our lives right now and find a half a dozen things which would classify as raisin cakes” (**Hosea 3:1-5**, p. 10).

We sell out for trivial and frivolous things that in eternity will mean nothing. Some people go after money, fame, pleasure or sports. Many will sell out worship for a birthday party. We don’t get too many to even come to Sunday night services. What is the reason, or what is the raisin cake?

Scripture asks the question, *what shall a man exchange for his soul?* Suppose you literally went after the world and got it. What actually would you have? Absolutely nothing! Because when a soul leaves this world it will immediately realize I sold out my life for raisin cakes.

C. (:2) The Execution of the Command – God Will Pay Whatever Price Is Necessary to Maintain His Persistent Love

*“So I bought her for myself
for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley.”*

Trent Butler: The amount Hosea paid for Gomer raises some problems. A shekel was a measure of weight equal perhaps to four-tenths of an ounce or 11.5 grams. A homer was about six bushels or 220 liters of grain, while a letheke was apparently one-half of a homer. This price was not excessive. A slave cost thirty shekels (**Exod. 21:32**). The bride price when Deuteronomy was written was fifty shekels (**Deut. 22:29**). Hosea may have had to scrape the money together. Perhaps unable to secure enough cash, he had to include payment-in-kind with grain. The important thing was the prophet's attitude in this transaction. He obeyed God without question.

J. Andrew Dearman: A cancelling of her indebtedness appears to be the point, whatever the combined silver equivalent of Hosea’s purchase. One cannot tell from such a brief description, however, if what Hosea did was to purchase Gomer herself or to pay in full a debt she owed that had otherwise constricted her activities. Readers would do well not to forget the parallel with Gomer’s initial acquisition by Hosea. It would have required gifts on his part to her family in order to facilitate his taking of her in marriage.

Allen Guenther: Has she sold herself into slavery because she was no longer sufficiently attractive to her lovers? Possibly. In that case, however, to refer to her as *beloved by another* (singular) and *practicing adultery* would be inappropriate. The strongest possibility is that she has become a **kept woman**. If so, she is neither formally a slave, nor is she any longer practicing prostitution. Her lover provides for her keep – her bed and board – in exchange for sexual favors.

The verb *buy* (*karah*) reinforces the idea that Hosea is purchasing the rights to her sexual favors. She is not a wife, and yet she could become his wife, if he so chose. After Hosea has purchased the rights to her sexual activity, he immediately serves notice that she will not be asked to serve in the role she has come to love – neither for Hosea nor for any other man (3:3). . .

This platonic relationship works an emotional hardship on both, but especially on Hosea; he is waiting for Gomer to have a change of heart. Meanwhile, his acts toward her spring from purest love. Such love waits for the spouse's inner renewal, for a rekindling of the deep bonds of affection they once experienced. It refuses to place demands on the other for personal gratification. The marriage bond is fully restored only when love produces repentance and love in return.

II. (:3-4) SANCTIFICATION PROCESS OF GOD'S LOVE

A. (:3) The Mutual Commitment to Sex Deprivation Commanded by Hosea – The Sanctification Process Requires Commitment over Time

*“Then I said to her, ‘You shall stay with me for many days.
You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man;
so I will also be toward you.’”*

J. Andrew Dearman: In context, therefore, the sense would be: “*You shall refrain from sexual activities outside our marriage, and I also will refrain from intimate relations with you*” (cf. NRSV). This rendering assumes a carryover (indicated by gam) of the negative particles from the previous clauses. Another possibility, however, is to see the last phrase simply as an affirmation that Hosea alone will live with her (so NIV: “*And I will live with you*”). In 3:4 comes a list of things that Israel will be forced to do without in the (near?) future. Since Gomer represents Israel, 3:4 lends contextual support for the view that a period of **sexual abstinence** and **moral purification** is indicated for her in 3:3. Hosea's abstinence is a continuation of the prophetic symbolic act initiated with his marriage. As the following verse indicates, Israel shall live for some time without the normal sociopolitical and religious institutions for a state. This is a period of its purification, a road to be taken along the way to restoration.

H. D. Beeby: Hosea now orders a form of house arrest which will keep her out of temptation's way. Virtue will have to be forced upon her. No sexual relationships will be permitted her, not even with Hosea. If she is to be denied intimacy, then he will share with her in the deprivation. Their relationship must be mutual, because this is deprivation with a purpose, the purpose mentioned at 2:7. The two husbands (Hosea/God) are each seeking a change of heart in their beloved. . .

The shell of marriage is there indeed but not the essence, which is love along with its physical manifestation. The form awaits the content, and that in turn awaits the loving response of the woman. The kept woman must first become a loving bride.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The purpose is to chasten Gomer, but with the ultimate purpose of stabilizing the household and renewing their relationship, even as God promised he would do with Israel.

Duane Garrett: The goal of Hosea is the resumption of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. If Gomer only lives in the home of Hosea as something of a guest (or a prisoner) and never enjoys the full status of wife (which includes sexual relations), then the covenant between Hosea and Gomer is never truly mended. The verse should be translated, *“And I said to her, ‘Many days you shall remain with me, and you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man, and then I shall be yours.’”*

James Mays: Just as Yahweh will bar the way to Israel’s trysting with the gods of Canaan (2.6), Hosea keeps the woman apart from every man – and waits. ‘*Many days*’, an indefinite period, however long, he waits for the act that alone can complete the symbolism, the return of his love by the woman. He will not go in to her because more than anything he wants her to come to him. The pathos and power of God’s love is embodied in these strange tactics (cf. 2.7, 14f.) – a love that imprisons to set free, destroys false love for the sake of true, punishes in order to redeem.

B. (:4) The Analogy Relating to God and Israel’s Deprivation – The Sanctification Process Purifies Us from Unholy Dependencies

Syncretistic nature of Israel’s approach to governance and religion is represented here in this picture of deprivation on multiple fronts. There are three couplets with the first item in each couplet related to God’s revealed order (though still corrupted by His unfaithful people) and the second item related to some idolatrous aspect of national and religious life.

1. Deprivation Relating to Political Governance and Military Dependency = Syncretistic Monarchical Leadership

*“For the sons of Israel will remain for many days
without king or prince,”*

J. Andrew Dearman: The lack of a king or prince means military defeat for Israel (and perhaps exile) and the transfer of political sovereignty to someone else.

2. Deprivation Relating to Religious Worship = Syncretistic Aids to Approaching God

“without sacrifice or sacred pillar,”

J. Andrew Dearman: **Standing stones** are unacceptably syncretistic according to Deuteronomy (7:5; 12:3; 16:22). They were employed by the Canaanite population of the land and should be destroyed rather than adopted in the worship of YHWH. That Deuteronomy has such a polemic against them strongly suggests that they were popular also in certain Israelite circles. Indeed, their employment in Israel is assumed in **Hos.**

10:1–2, where there is a polemic against the multiplication of altars and standing stones as examples of guilt before the Lord. They are, moreover, associated with the ancestral period in a more neutral way, particularly with Jacob. He erected a standing stone at an evening stopover where God had revealed himself, renaming the place Bethel (**Gen. 28:10–22**). The function of the pillar is not made clear; it might represent the ladder, the connection that Jacob had seen between heaven and earth, or commemorate a theophany (pedestal for an invisible deity?), or represent Jacob on holy ground while he is away. He also set up a pillar at the grave of Rachel (**Gen. 35:20**) and to commemorate an agreement with his father-in-law (**Gen. 31:45–6**), both of which may have had a different function from the stone erected at Bethel. Moses erected twelve stones as part of the covenant ratification procedure at Mt. Sinai (**Exod. 24:3–8**). Joshua erected a memorial stone as part of a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem (**Josh. 24:22–27**). There is no suggestion in the Genesis account that Jacob's act at Bethel (or that of Moses and Joshua) is unacceptable. Nevertheless, as with developments in any number of religious practices, standing stones became a snare in the cult of YHWH. The general expression in **3:4** does not indicate whether the pillars in question were part of the (baalized?) Yahwistic cult or represented other deities.

3. Deprivation Relating to Divination and Guidance = Syncretistic Methods to Discern the Divine Will and Gain His Favor

“and without ephod or household idols.”

H. D. Beeby: Thus Israel is to be deprived in the secular and spiritual areas of life, and to be robbed of assurance about both past and future.

Allen Guenther: Together, *ephod and teraphim* represent guidance in everyday affairs of life. In exile, these means of searching for direction will be removed until Israel again longs for God and seeks for him in acceptable ways.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Whereas the ephod was a proper means of asking about the future, the household idols (Hebrew, *teraphim*) were a means of divination of an entirely pagan origin (see **Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2**). As was the case with their ecclesiastical privileges, Israel had ignored the divinely appointed means of divination and had sought out that which was forbidden by God.

J. Andrew Dearman: The phrase *ephod and teraphim* suggests that the two implements go together. They are, furthermore, to be associated with **divination** or cultic means of ascertaining the will of the deity. In the Israelite cult, an ephod was part of a garment or a pouch that could be carried by cultic functionaries seeking to discern the will of the Lord (**1 Sam. 23:6**). The high priest wore an ephod to carry out his sacred tasks. It is associated with inscribed stones and the Urim and Thummim (**Exod. 28:1–43**; cf. **1 Sam. 2:28**). Teraphim are implements, perhaps statues or another type of representative figure, associated with “divination” (*qesem*; **1 Sam. 15:23; Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2**). They too can be a part of priestly paraphernalia and are mentioned together with an ephod at a shrine in the hill country of Ephraim (**Judg. 17:5; 18:14–20**). Teraphim are part of the corrupt cultic paraphernalia in the Jerusalem temple that Josiah later

removed (2 Kgs. 23:24). It is their role in concert with the ephod that Hosea has in mind.

Duane Garrett: By metonymy absence of ephod and sacrifice implies absence of priests and temple worship. Although most of the items on this list are not intrinsically evil, probably all are to be understood as corrupted through participation in idolatry.

John Goldingay: Hosea is portraying “a society in disorder,” one “deprived of everything crucial for meaningful political-religious survival.”

III. (:5) SALVATION PURPOSE OF GOD’S LOVE

H. D. Beeby: The days of waiting will end, and then the reason for the waiting and the nature of the waiting will become clearer. The word “*afterward*” in v. 5, therefore, introduces a **great turning point**, for here is the longed for **climax**. That climax centers on three verbs: “*return*,” “*seek*,” “*come in fear*.” It is the climax of Israel’s response and corresponds in part to 1:11 and to the last phrase of 2:23.

A. Return

“Afterward the sons of Israel will return”

James Mays: ‘*Afterwards*’! In this one adverb is the sign that in the history which Yahweh makes there is **hope**. When his action fills and determines time, then time becomes pregnant with the birth of a new day and a new life. The deprivation of judgment opens the way to a second beginning. This ‘*afterwards*’ is a pivotal point in Hosea’s ‘eschatology’ toward which the punishment of God always moves – the time of return (2.7), of the answer (2.15), of the ‘*my husband*’ (2.16), of the true confession (2.23). The turning point comes when the wife/people move toward Yahweh; their act is the wonderful event of the new time. And yet, it is not so much a matter of their working out their salvation, as accepting as grace the inexorable refusal of Yahweh to let them do aught else but move toward him. They would not seek him, if he had not already found them; **their act is really an expression of his action**.

Trent Butler: God’s **probationary period** for Israel has a purpose: it will lead Israel to return and seek the LORD. The word *return* points in several directions.

- It can mean turn away from idols and to God.
- It can mean repent from sin and serve God.
- It can mean return from exile and live in the homeland again.

The prophet hints at all these meanings.

Duane Garrett: In this text Israel plays the part of the prodigal son. She returns in fear and yet is received in love. By analogy the destitute Gomer might have viewed her purchase by Hosea with terror. Would he now extract revenge on her as his slave? But Yahweh had commanded Hosea to love her, and Hosea gave her dignity, a new start, and an opportunity to regain her status as the prophet’s wife. Israel is to “*return to*” and

“seek” (two words that connote **repentance**) Yahweh. In fear they call on him to restore the blessing they have squandered.

David Allen Hubbard: Where *return* and *seek* occur together, they reinforce each other – to return with the full desire for fellowship with God on his terms (cf. **7:10**). In the present context, where the returning and seeking follow a time of intense political and spiritual deprivation, return may carry with it not only the idea of repentance but of **return home from exile**.

B. Seek

*“and seek the LORD their God
and David their king;”*

Trent Butler: “Seek the LORD” can refer to

- seeking the Lord's direction (**2 Sam. 21:1**)
- or to praying for his favor (**Zech. 8:21–22**)
- or to trusting and obeying the Lord (**Prov. 28:5**).

God's probation means the people of Israel will confine their seeking to one God. Returning in repentance to him, they will worship him alone.

Duane Garrett: The prophecy that they would seek “*David their king*” is **messianic**. The phrase does not mean simply that the Israelites would again submit to the Davidic monarchy and so undo Jeroboam's rebellion. Had that been the point, we would expect the text to say that they would return to the “*house of David*.” Instead we see “*David their king*” set alongside of Yahweh as the one to whom the people return in pious fear. This “*David*” cannot be the historical king, who was long dead, but is the messianic king for whom he is a figure. As **D. A. Hubbard** states, returning to David implies the reunion of the two kingdoms (**1:11**), an end to dynastic chaos (**8:4**), and an end to seeking protection through alliances with pagan states (**7:11**). Unity and security can come to Israel only when they seek God and his Christ. . .

The eschatological fulfillment of all this is in the “*last days*.” This phrase is better translated “*at the end of the days*.” The “*end*” (*’aḥārît*) is the **time of fulfillment**, when the final outcome of God's program is realized. The word creates a distance between the age of fulfillment and the age of the prophet himself and is often associated with hope. It implies that the people of God must live in expectation of redemption and vindication.

Allen Guenther: To *seek God* means to approach him in worship, to passionately long for his presence in one's life, and to live out his righteousness (cf. **Matt. 6:33**).

C. Come in Fear

*“and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness
in the last days.”*

Trent Butler: Such return to God will be an emotional affair. Israel will come trembling—with trepidation, dread, and fear. They knew they did not deserve to approach his presence. They were fully aware of their repeated sins that deserved punishment. Still, they will return to God seeking grace and hope. And they will find his blessings in the *last days*.

J. Andrew Dearman: The final clause of **3:5** indicates that Israel will tremble or be in awe (*pāḥad*) before the Lord. It is difficult to find a precise equivalent in English to a verb that runs the gamut from “fear” to “be awestruck,” and can be used to describe both the positive and negative aspects of such feelings. One aid in interpretation comes in the addition of *and his goodness* (*tôb*). Israel will present themselves *to the Lord and his goodness*, which suggests at least a positive apprehension on Israel’s part of God’s disposition toward them. **Jeremiah 33:9** offers some parallels in perspective and vocabulary. Speaking of joy and praise that Jerusalem’s future restoration will bring to the Lord among the nations, the prophet states that they “*will be in awe (pāḥad) and tremble (rāgaz) concerning all the goodness (tôb) and all the peace that I am doing for her.*” . . .

Hosea’s call to the people to return to YHWH is based on his conviction that YHWH’s forgiveness and goodness work in tandem, and that YHWH has defined for the people what is good in accord with his integrity.

Robin Routledge: The **positive nature** of the return is further indicated by the reference to Yahweh’s blessings (*tûb*). This refers to the abundance of Yahweh’s provision (e.g. **Jer. 2:7**). In **Jeremiah 31:12** the term is linked with ‘*the grain, the new wine and the olive oil*’, the very things forfeited by Israel because of the people’s failure to recognize their true source (**Hos. 2:8**). In the coming days, those blessings will be restored. The term may also refer to God’s own character (cf. **Exod. 33:19**; **Pss 25:7**; **145:7**), and so may point beyond the restoration of material blessings to the renewal of all aspects of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people.

Allen Guenther: The end result is deep reverence for God and a willingness to receive *his goodness* as his bounties. The history of Israel’s unfaithfulness has centered in their forgetting the Lord, claiming his promises as unchangeable, and even crediting his gifts to Baal. When Israel repents, they will reencounter God in all his majesty. Their casual attitudes will melt away in awe before his presence. When they receive goodness from the Lord, they will accept it with gratitude as gift.

These restorative events shall occur in the *latter days*. That term is typically prophetic and refers elsewhere to the period of restoration (**Deut. 4:30**, RSV; **Isa. 2:2**). In the end, the Lord achieves his original design, in spite of the waywardness of his people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does God use discipline and deprivation to accomplish His purposes?
- 2) Why can we trust God to work out His perfect plan to overcome our sin and restore us to a place of blessing?
- 3) Are we quick to obey God even when His directions don't make logical sense to us?
- 4) How can a commitment to persistent love strengthen our marriage bonds?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: Hosea reports how God called him to pursue his adulterous wife and so portray the Lord's love for the Israelites – a covenantal and sacrificial love that is vitally committed to the relationship. This is despite Israel's idolatry and love for everything other than God, including, somewhat sarcastically, raisin cakes! . . . Hosea implores Gomer to remain faithful to him, and he promises he will be faithful to her, even forgoing marital intimacy for a time (v. 3). The purpose of the abstinence is that Gomer might fully return to the relationship. In the same way, the Israelites will undergo exile as God's punishment, having forfeited the privileges and benefits of the intimacy of the covenant relationship. God will remove key elements of their national life and worship that had become corrupt (3:4). Yet restoration will follow judgment, just as Moses promised in Deuteronomy 4:29-31 and 30:1-6. The nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms after Solomon's reign because of his idolatry (1 Ki 11:1-10), but it will unite again under a new Davidic king (cf. Hos 1:11). The Davidic king who pursues and redeems God's unfaithful people and restores God's blessing is Jesus.

John Goldingay: The love that Hosea then portrays God as manifesting and the love that God looks for is a love that can be commanded. It denotes **action** at least as much as **emotion**. Given that God is talking about love between a man and a woman, it might be odd if it had no emotional element. But at least as significant an aspect to God's love for human beings is that it is effective, not just affective. God is committed to his people. At least as significant an aspect to the love God seeks from his people is for it to be effective, not just affective. God is not very interested in people telling him that they love him (people in the Bible hardly ever tell God that they love him). He is interested in their acting in a way that denotes commitment to him. Because he has bought them, they are bound to honor him with their bodies.

Lloyd Ogilvie: But much as we try to personalize the message, we dare not miss that Gomer was a type of Israel and that God's reconciling love was for His wayward people. And the Incarnation **Hosea 3** foreshadows is of an atonement that was cosmic, a once, never-to-be-repeated reconciliation of the world in time, on time, and for all time. It is beneath the cross that we move through an exposition of the verses of this

spectacular chapter about God's unbroken love from His broken heart. We never really know how much a person loves us until we know how much he is willing to suffer for us; it is the suffering that measures the love. It is this quality of suffering love that is the focus of Hosea **chapter 3**.

Robin Routledge: These verses indicate Yahweh's willingness to restore an unfaithful people. This is motivated by love, and it is significant that Yahweh's love for Israel prompts Hosea to show his love to Gomer. While it is likely that Hosea's unhappy marital situation gave an insight into Yahweh's feelings about unfaithful Israel, the renewal of the relationship is wholly the result of God's initiative. Hosea seems to have been prepared to allow his relationship with Gomer to end. Yahweh, though, will not allow the same with regard to Israel. His is a love that will not let his people go.

Restoration, though, involves a period of discipline. This appears to parallel the privations of **chapter 2**. Significantly, however, in **chapter 3**, discipline is directly related to divine love. If their relationship with Yahweh is to be renewed, the people need to turn away from the things that hinder that relationship and turn back to him. Yahweh's restorative love opens the way for that to take place.

Future hope here is linked with a coming Davidic king. This might have appeared subversive for a northern prophet, though prophets were no strangers to political controversy. The people probably expected this hope to be fulfilled within the normal royal succession. In time, though, that gave way to the eschatological hope of a coming Messiah, who was associated with the kingdom of God. Christians see the fulfilment of this expectation in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom hope is extended beyond Israel and Judah to encompass the whole world.

TEXT: Hosea 4:1-3

TITLE: SUMMARY OF GOD'S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

**GOD'S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL EXPOSES HER MORAL FAILURES
DERIVED FROM NOT KNOWING GOD -- LEADING TO COSMIC
CONSEQUENCES**

INTRODUCTION:

Allen Guenther: The book of Hosea divides naturally into two parts. **Chapter four** begins the second part. Here the personal family experiences of Hosea recede into the background and the nation of Israel takes center stage. . . The rest of the book will unpack these three compact verses.

OUTLINE

The Case: God Versus North Israel, 4:1a-b

4:1a Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

4:1b The Case Described: Heirs Claim Squatter's Right

The Charges, 4:1c-2

4:1c Found Missing: Variations on a Theme

No Integrity: Jezreel

No Family Affection: Lo-ruhamah

No Knowledge of God: Lo-ammi

4:2 A Litany of Evil: Violations of the Law

Cursing: Atheism in Action

Deception: Destroying Trust

Murder: Premeditated Violence

Theft: Threat to Livelihood

Adultery: Violations of Family Intimacy

The Snowball Effect

The Whole World Cries with Them, 4:3

Gary Smith: Hosea begins by calling the Israelites to attention (**4:1a**), announcing that God has a covenant lawsuit against his people (**4:1b**), and revealing the reasons for this dispute (**4:1c**). His complaint is that the people exhibit no true faithfulness to him, no steadfast covenant love toward him or others, and no acknowledgment of him as their divine overlord. These three elements have disrupted God's relationship with his covenant people.

James Mays: This oracle stands at the beginning of the second major section of the book, which in contrast to **chs. 1-3** is wholly composed of an arrangement of sayings.

The collector must have found it an ideal introduction to the sequence with its opening summons to the Israelites to hear Yahweh's word and its comprehensive statement of Israel's guilt and of the punishment to come upon the entire land with all its creatures. In spite of its brevity the oracle is virtually a paradigm of Hosea's message of judgment. The oracle begins with a proclamation formula (elsewhere in Hosea only in **5.1**) which identifies the words as Yahweh's message to Israel (**v. 1a**). The following sentence (**v. 1b α**) defines the subject of the herald's proclamation; he is there to make an announcement concerning the legal suit which Yahweh has against the residents of the land. Appropriately the saying itself is formulated in the idiom of speech in the court, an example of the 'court speech' in which the prophets on occasion clothed their announcements of judgment. Though the saying is introduced as the '*word of Yahweh*', the saying never shifts to the style of the divine speech; this may be due to the subject matter or more probably the prophet reports the business of the divine court without resort to the style. The prophet cites the complaint (*rīb*), the substance of Yahweh's case, first in negatives using normative concepts for the conduct expected of Israel (**v. 1bβ**) and then positively (**v. 2**) by itemizing a series of crimes against the divine law. The result is the most comprehensive picture possible of the sins of omission and commission, a portrayal of a population living in flagrant contradiction of their Lord. The announcement of punishment (**v. 3**) states the sentence of the divine court.

David Allen Hubbard: This is clearly a **new section**:

- (1) marked by a call to attention – '*Hear the word of Yahweh*' (cf. **5:1**; **Amos 3:1**; **4:1**; **5:1**);
- (2) addressed to Israel, who had been discussed as they in **3:4–5**;
- (3) phrased in poetry not prose; and
- (4) directed to the present sins of the people not to future rescue.

It is a comprehensive judgment speech indicting sin in sweeping terms (**vv. 1–2**) and announcing a judgment of cosmic scope (**v. 3**). The formal opening, the use of controversy (Heb. *rīb*; cf. on **2:2**), and the legal tone of the indictment have been interpreted as the framework of a covenant lawsuit (**Wolff**, p. 66). Since a number of ingredients are lacking – a summons to witnesses (cf. **Mic. 6:3–5**), questions and answers about divine requirements (cf. **Mic. 6:6–8**) – it is more likely that the literary form compresses an argument or quarrel between Yahweh and the people rather than a scene of formal legal charges.

John Goldingay: Neat Structure

- Exhortation to listen (**4:1a**)
- The reason (*kî*): Yahweh has an argument to set out (**4:1bα**)
- The content of the argument (*kî*) (**4:1bβ–2**):
 - negative (**v. 1bβ**)
 - and positive (**v. 2**)
- The consequences that will follow ('*al-kēn*, **4:3**)

(:1a) SOLEMN SUMMONS – PAY ATTENTION

"Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel,"

Robin Routledge: The term *rib* sometimes points to a legal charge brought by God against the people because of their failure to meet their covenant obligations. That seems to be the case here too, though this oracle does not follow the general pattern of covenant lawsuits.

I. (:1b) COMPELING CASE AGAINST ISRAEL

“For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land,”

J. Andrew Dearman: 4:1–3 is an accusation and a dispute using terminology that reflects formal means of accusation and contains a summary of the evidence for the charge. . . The case is against the *inhabitants of the land*, which for readers of the book will bring to mind the charge in 1:2 that “*the land commits harlotry against YHWH*.” The addressees in 4:1 make explicit what was implicit in that earlier verse: the personified land represents the people of Israel. The inhabitants are also the descendants (lit. children) of Israel. Their identity is that of a covenant people, bound to YHWH by promise and by historical intervention.

Trent Butler: Once these inhabitants of the land had been Canaanites whom God had told Israel to destroy (**Josh. 9:4**). Now the inhabitants were Israelites whom God had now begun to destroy.

God had good reason. He could not find the characteristics that were supposed to mark Israel off as God's people who were unlike the peoples of the land.

Jeremy Thomas: Now why does he refer to them as the *inhabitants of the land*? Because **it's His land**. It's not Israel's land. Really it's God's land and Israel is His tenant in the land. But ultimately it's His land and they've been bad tenants. So he says this just to remind them, hey guys, it's My land. I let you live in it. I gave you blessing in it. I gave you agriculture, I gave you nutrients, I gave you produce, I gave you rains, I gave you blessing. And what have you done to Me? How have you thanked Me? It's My land. And in the Hebrew there's an article in front of the word land which means it emphasizes not just land, but “*the land*,” **the land of the covenant**, that's the issue. You are inhabiting My land.

D. A. Carson: The language used here implies that God has entered into an argument or quarrel with Israel. Perhaps we should think of a lawsuit, such as was carried out at the gates of the city. We can imagine Hosea approaching the elders sitting for judgment, and announcing that God himself has a **dispute** to bring.

II. (:1b-2) COMPREHENSIVE CHARGES

Jeremy Thomas: So what's God pointing out right at the start of the case? No stability

in the nation, no loyal love, no intimacy with God. In other words, it's all vertical stuff missing. It isn't social problems in the community, its **theological problems** in the community. These people have first and foremost a theological problem. After that we get into the social problems. Always think this way. Train yourself to think this way. You can talk all day about the social problems, so and so can't straighten his behavior out, but ultimately the social problems stem from theological problems. So therefore if you're going to solve a behavior problem you have to get into theological discussion. See, everyone recognizes the social problem, so and so is misbehaving and they need to adjust to societal norms so we send them to the local psychiatrist, the local AA, pop a pill. It's always a gimmick and the solution is to straighten out your theology. Something is screwed up deep in the heart of people that no gimmick can repair. Of course, we're religiously neutral so it couldn't be a theological issue. And right there you've already admitted it is. There is no neutrality. If you say God's not related to the problem then you've said in effect God doesn't exist and that my friend is a theological statement. And until you solve the theological tension in your soul you're never going to fix in any permanent way the social problem.

A. (:1b) Sins of Omission – Lacking Virtues – Theological Issues

1. No Firm Commitment / Integrity / Faithfulness -- Jezreel

“Because there is no faithfulness”

H. Ronald Vandermeij: In terms of that which had been omitted, the prophet laments that Israel had not cultivated within herself the three blessings that spoke of her unique covenant relationship to the Lord: faithfulness, kindness, and the knowledge of God.

Faithfulness, which comes from a root word that means “to confirm, to sustain, to support” (Hebrew, *emeth*; literally, “truth”), was nowhere to be found because the people of Israel had not sustained or supported the covenant with God—a pattern that spilled over into their relationships with their fellow men (7:1, 2, 11; 10:13; 11:12).

Kindness (Hebrew, *chesed*; often translated “lovingkindness, mercy, kindness, and loyalty”) is that special Hebrew term for **God's covenant love**, which was first manifested to Israel in her redemption from Egypt (Exod. 15: 13). This covenant love will again be operative when God draws the whole house of Israel back to Himself (2:19; 10:12; 12:6; Jer. 31:1-3; cf. Psalms 17:7; 25:6; 69:16; 103:4; Isa. 63:7; Jer. 9:24; 16:5; 32:18).

Gary Smith: The quality of “faithfulness” (‘*emet*) or truth describes a firmness in the people's commitment (their yes cannot be a half-hearted or unresolved decision), a reliability in their responsibilities (they do not waver back and forth, but have integrity), and an honesty about what they say (there is no deception, but the people have made a lasting choice). People who have this quality will be true and faithful to what they know and will give themselves to it completely. If the Israelites are untrustworthy, uncommitted, deceptive, and undecided about their devotion to God, how can God maintain a relationship with them?

Allen Guenther: When ‘*emet* is absent, people are cavalier with the truth in casual conversation, as well as when under oath (Jer. 9:5; Isa. 48:1). Its opposite is deceit,

lies, providing false witness, perverting justice, and fickleness. People without *'emet* cannot be trusted; they lack essential integrity. Deep down they are fractured with fissures spreading throughout their being. This absence of *'emet*, signified by the name Jezreel, dominates the prophecies of **Hosea 11:12 – 14:8**.

2. No Covenant Love – Lo-Ruhamah “or kindness”

Gary Smith: The quality of “*steadfast covenant love*” (*hesed*) demonstrates a loving and compassionate attitude devoted to maintaining an existing relationship. Such people keep their obligations to their partners based on their care for them. They are loyal to the relationship, for *hesed* “is the ‘essence’ of the covenantal relationship.” They express their emotional heart connection to the one they love both by their actions and their words. Their love is deep and consistent. If the Israelites do not maintain a love relationship with God, how can their covenant relationship continue in any kind of meaningful way?

James Mays: *Hesed* denotes the attitude and activity which founds and maintains a relation; the relation can be one given by birth or the social order, or created by arrangement. A man shows *hesed* when he is concerned and responsive to do in a given relation what another can rightfully expect according to the norms of that relationship. In Hosea the sphere of *hesed* is the covenant with Yahweh.

3. No Knowledge of God – Lo-Ammi “Or knowledge of God in the land.”

Gary Smith: The concept of “*knowing God*” has both an objective aspect (truthful information about who he is) and a subjective aspect (a personal relationship with God that acknowledges him as the sovereign power over one’s life and excludes any acknowledgment of Baal as deity). This characteristic is especially important because some of the people were worshiping multiple gods and confusing God with Baal (**2:16**). They have not made the effort to really know God. Part of the reason for this ignorance and confusion was the general acceptance of Canaanite religious beliefs in Israelite culture, plus a lack of clear priestly teaching about God from the Torah (**4:6**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: What does it mean to **know God** and live with a knowledge of Him? It involves both **intimacy** and **integrity**. The **intimacy** of the Thou-I relationship we were created to experience with God requires the opening of our innermost being to Him just as He has revealed His innermost nature to us. The word intimacy means “proceeding from within, inward, internal.” In the Hebrew, the word for “knowledge,” as we have seen in our exposition of **Hosea 2:20**, has the same root as “to know.” It also is used for the physical and spiritual oneness of a husband and wife. Knowledge of God is more than ideas about Him. Knowledge of God involves the total inner person: intellect, emotion, and will. God knows all about what is going on inside us—we cannot hide from Him. The beginning of our knowledge of God, our relationship with Him, is when we know that we are known. So the psalmist says, “*O LORD, You have searched me*”

and known me” (Ps. 139:1). The psalmist yields his inner being to God when he realizes he is known by Him, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24).* Both our understanding and awareness of God are met in response to our being known absolutely and thoroughly by Him.

God has revealed Himself throughout history and sublimely in Jesus Christ. But until we yield our inner self to Him, we do not experience an intimate union with Him.

Knowledge of God also calls forth our **integrity**. The word means wholeness—undivided, unimpaired—completeness. Integrity is congruity of behavior, consistency between what we believe and what we do. Intimacy with God, knowing Him as He has revealed Himself, must be inseparably intertwined with His character and commandments. He has chosen to be our God and elected us to be His people. Knowing Him therefore requires integrity, congruity of a life of faithfulness. Obedience is the secret of a growing knowledge of God.

James Mays: The lack of the knowledge of God is **Israel’s cardinal deficiency (4.2)**; it is what Yahweh demands rather than sacrifice (**6.6**); in spite of the people’s claims and resolutions (**6.3; 8.2**) its reality is completely missing in their present life. Neither pious confession nor enthusiastic cult result in the knowledge of God. What is required is the knowledge that Yahweh as he was revealed in the Exodus is their only God (**13.4**), that his healing help saw them through the history of their beginnings (**12.3**), and that it is Yahweh who gives them the good things of the land (**2.8**).

Allen Guenther: The theme of **Hosea 4:4 – 6:3** centers on the danger of not knowing God and warns Israel against pursuing that course of life.

S. Lewis Johnson: The difficulty ultimately lies in the **doctrine**. When there is no knowledge of God, then we may expect dishonesty and we may expect all of the other kinds of things that characterize a people who do not know the lovingkindness of God. So honesty and love are the **products of the knowledge of God**.

Now in the details, one who knows the Ten Commandments immediately recognizes that what Hosea is doing is charging the Nation Israel with the breaking of the commandments that have to do with the **relationship of man to man**, the second table of the law. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery – they’ve broken the sixth, the seventh, the eighth and the ninth commandments, and the results even touch the lower creation.

B. (:2) Sins of Commission – Multiplying Vices – Social Issues

1. Transgressing God’s Laws

“There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery.”

Gary Smith: They are breaking their covenant with God by doing what was prohibited in the Ten Commandments (**Ex. 20:2–17**), which summarize the covenant

requirements. The people curse (take God's name in vain), lie, murder, steal, commit adultery, and break all the boundaries laid out to regulate their covenant relationship with God. Some may be surprised that Hosea brings up these types of issues rather than the worship of false gods, but to Hosea the prophet, religious faith and social action are mirrors of one another. One can argue all day about whether a person really believes or loves God; it is easier to decide the issue without argument by simply pointing to the way God's people are living. Faith and love are revealed by behavior.

David Allen Hubbard: If virtues are lacking, vices are present, each of which is expressed in terms plucked verbatim from Israel's law codes:

- (1) **swearing** (Heb. *'lh*) breaks the commands against unworthy uses of the divine name (**Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11**) by damning others and attaching Yahweh's name to the curse (cf. **10:4; Exod. 21:17, 20; Judg. 17:2**);
- (2) **lying** (Heb. *khš*) violates the personal and legal rights of others, especially when it entails false witness in legal deliberations, financial transactions, or religious vows (**7:3; 10:13; 12:1; Lev. 19:11; cf. Exod. 23:1–3, 6–9**);
- (3) **killing** (Heb. *ršh*) is murder, the taking of human life without due process of law (**6:9; Exod. 20:13; Deut. 27:24**);
- (4) **stealing** (Heb. *gnb*) originally implied kidnapping and was expanded to include crimes of appropriating the valuable possessions of another (**Exod. 20:15, 17; Lev. 9:11**; note the death penalty for it in **Exod. 21:16**); and
- (5) **committing adultery** (Heb. *n'p*; see on **1:2; 2:2; 3:1**) caps the list as the expression of Israel's spiritual and physical promiscuity (cf. **4:13–14; 7:4; Exod. 20:14; Lev. 20:10**).

J. Andrew Dearman: Three of the transgressions (murder, theft, adultery) are terms also used in the Decalogue, but the accusations in **4:2** are not limited to its strictures. The first five transgressions are those that ruin human community and are an affront to the God of Israel. All five of them reappear elsewhere in Hosea. **Swearing** (*'ālōh*) is probably used in the context of swearing an oath in the form of a curse or imprecation. In that regard, it may be similar to the third commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids the use of the Lord's name "*in vain*." **Isaiah 24:6** uses the term as a noun in the context of imprecation or curse (whatever its origin) with negative consequences for the land: "*a curse ('ālā) consumes the land; those who inhabit her are guilty*." Much of the vocabulary in **Isa. 24:6** is also contained in **Hos. 4:2–3**, including the connection between curse, guilty inhabitants of the land, and the debilitating circumstances for the land. The connection reflects Hosea's holistic mode of thinking and its implication that negative acts influence communities as a whole.

Lying (*kaḥēš*) is also more broadly deceitfulness. Possibly the term approximates what is forbidden in the ninth commandment, false testimony (**Exod. 20:16**). Lying is not only deceit, but can be part of defrauding and condemning another person.

Murder (*rāšōaḥ*) is the unsanctioned taking of human life; the term is used in the Decalogue with similar meaning. Context determines its specificity. The repeated use of the term bloodshed (*dāmīm*), at the end of the verse would seem to indicate the gravity

and perceived frequency of this crime and the one that follows it. Hosea attributes it to a priestly band in **6:9**.

Theft (*gānōb*) is also used in the Decalogue. It can be used in case law, where it describes kidnapping a person and stealing possessions (**Exod. 21:16–17**). No guilt is attached to the homeowner who strikes and kills a thief breaking into his property (**Exod. 22:2** [MT 1]). The image of the “*thief who breaks in*” is used in **Hos. 7:1**.

Adultery (*nā`ōp*) is a term that Hosea can use elsewhere in a metaphorical sense, referring to the faithlessness of the people toward God. In the Decalogue it is used in its legal and covenantal sense to describe the breaking of the marriage vow wherein a man has sexual relations with a woman married to another man. For a married woman to have sexual relations with a man other than her husband is also considered adultery. The violation of marriage appears to be the charge in **4:2**, as it occurs in the context of other social transgressions.

The verb associated with the list of vices indicates that they *break forth* (*pāraš*) in debilitating influence. The term can indicate vigorous and aggressive acts (**Exod. 19:22, 24; 2 Sam. 5:20**) and is also associated more specifically with violence and theft. In noun form it represents a robber or thief (**Jer. 7:11; Ezek. 7:22**). In **Ezek. 18:10** a violent person (*pārîš*) is one who sheds blood. Hence the last clause of the verse follows naturally from the description of a societal outbreak of vices.

The expression **bloodshed follows bloodshed** (lit. “*bloodshed touches bloodshed*”) characterizes societal dissolution as a result of the vices listed previously. Thus it may include various acts of violence and theft, including murder.

2. Escalating Violence

“They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: There is a mounting intensity as Hosea lists the charges. Without a knowledge of God, they break all restraint. Literally this means “they break out” or they break through,” with the idea of restraint or boundaries implied. The commandments of God defined boundaries or restraints against destructive tendencies of sinful humans. When the commandments were rejected (no knowledge of God), there was no longer any restraint. This causes “*bloodshed after bloodshed*” (**Hos. 4:2**).

Allen Guenther: The indictments leveled against the people of the land consist of charges representing a rapid escalation of evil. The glue that holds society together is dissolving. Violence of one kind produces violence of another kind until the nation teeters at the brink of anarchy (cf. **Amos 3:9-10**).

Thomas Constable: Violent crimes were so common that they seemed to follow one another without interruption.

John Schultz: The Hebrew in **vs. 2** is rather graphic in its description. It reads literally: *“By swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery they break out and blood touches blood.”* The Hebrew word, rendered by the NIV *“they break all bounds”* is *parats*, which means, *“to break out,”* literally or figuratively. It suggests that crime had reached **epidemic proportions**.

III. (:3) COSMIC CONSEQUENCES

*“Therefore the land mourns, And everyone who lives in it languishes
Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky;
And also the fish of the sea disappear.”*

Robin Routledge: Human sin affects the stability of the created order and may allow chaos to return. A similar idea may lie behind the reference in **Romans 8:19–22** to a frustrated and groaning creation.

James Mays: The catastrophe is not merely a drought, though partially pictured by drought-vocabulary, but a terrible diminution of life-forces which tends to a total absence of life. It is the effect of the divine curse and in this case for breach of covenant. See the juxtaposition of covenant breaking and such disaster in **Isa. 24.4ff.; 33.8–9**. The land is polluted by the crime of its inhabitants and will share the curse. No creature will escape. When the people of God break covenant, the whole creation suffers the consequences of their sin (**Gen. 8.21**; cf. **Rom. 8.19ff.**).

David Allen Hubbard: The annihilation of the animal kingdom is pictured in language that outstrips the flood story, where at least representatives of each species were preserved (**Gen. 6:18–22**). Hosea’s holocaust resembles closely Zephaniah’s (**1:2–3**) and echoes **Genesis 1:30** in such a way that the appointed judgment for Israel’s sin is nothing less than the ‘reversal of creation’. Thus, Yahweh’s restoration, promised in **2:15–23**, must include a renewed covenant with the entire animal kingdom (**v. 18**).

J. Andrew Dearman: After a summary of the evidence is listed, God’s case against the land and its inhabitants results in the dissolution of both the human and animal societies who inhabit the land. Indeed, the land itself is depicted as ill, just as the human community is rotten. This is Hosea’s holistic analysis at work. The three categories of animals, birds, and fish here in **4:3** are those listed in **Ps. 8:7–8** (MT 8–9), a psalm that celebrates the exalted place of humankind in God’s good creation. The environment depicted in **Hos. 4:3** is the withering, physically weak and depleted land of Israel. If bloodshed is the lot of the human community, then weakness and loss infect the land’s nonhuman inhabitants as well. This is tantamount to the reversal of creation and its good order, undone by human fallibility and culpability. Whereas the human community (and most certainly Israel) is designated collectively as God’s stewards, intended to bring order and rule in a good creation, human failure permeates creation with disorder and debilitation.

Verse 3 employs a verbal word pair to describe the disorder and weakness of the land and its inhabitants. They are the verbs *’ābal* (“*mourn*”) and *’āmal* (“*waste away*”), used together in eight other contexts. Just as the land can be personified as harlotrous, so she can be depicted as mourning, weak, and sad. She is the matrix of life for the people and animals, and even when she is not, the fish of the sea are nevertheless similarly affected. In the holistic thinking of Hosea, the people and land (plants and animals) live in a symbiotic relationship. When YHWH and Israel live in a restored covenant relationship, as depicted at the conclusion of **ch. 2**, then the health and vitality of the land are everywhere apparent. The current failures of Israel, however, function like disease or a stain to produce an environmental debilitation. Such is the predicament of YHWH’s people and land (his household) in **4:1–3**. It is a salutary reminder to readers that **failures have consequences** and that they cannot be compartmentalized and kept from permeating aspects of corporate existence.

Richard Patterson: After cataloguing the prevailing crimes of Israelite society, Hosea warns his hearers of the **dire consequences** of their conduct (**v.3**). Because they have committed spiritual adultery by their devotion to Baal, the Canaanite storm god who supposedly brought them the much needed rain for their crops (a violation of the first commandment), God will demonstrate to them just who it is that is in command of the natural world. Have they forgotten the demonstration of God’s authority through the ministry of Elijah (**1 Kings 17-18**)? They will soon understand that Baal is powerless. Land is here personified as a mourner who has witnessed the perishing of those who depended on it. Indeed, all life will suffer—men, animals, birds, and water creatures. As **Sweeney** points out, “By employing such language, Hosea conveys the necessary inter-relationship between human actions and the state of the natural world, i.e. the role of humans to maintain the world of creation (cf. **Gen 1:26**). If human beings fail to maintain the proper order of their lives, **the entire world of creation suffers.**”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does a knowledge of God promote holiness in moral conduct?
- 2) Why do we maintain that moral righteousness is derived from orthodox theology?
- 3) What fuels the escalation of the cycle of violence?
- 4) What is the relationship between man’s sin and the condition of the environment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: A new section of the book begins. The Lord takes up his case against the people and priests, acting as prosecutor and judge. The heart of the case is

that God and his ways have been forgotten (v. 1). The people's relationship with the Lord has broken down such that the people no longer reflect his faithful and loving character. Instead, they disobey the fundamental requirements of the covenant (represented in the Ten Commandments: cf. **Ex 20; Dt 5**), leading to a cycle of violence and retribution. In addition, the land and its creatures suffer on account of human sin (cf. **Ro 8:22**).

Derek Kidner: Scripture in general has two things to say about such **rampant wickedness**. On the one hand it may question the boundaries we draw between serious and light offences, and between actions and attitudes, seeing for example (to go through this list) an inconsiderate word as little better than a curse (**Pr. 27:14**), insincerity as nothing but a lie (**Jn. 8:55**), hatred as murder (**1 Jn. 3:15**), meanness as theft (**Mal. 3:8ff.**), and lustful imaginings as mental adultery (**Mt. 5:28**). From its embryonic to its adult form, so to speak, a sin may change its names and its ability to hurt, but not its nature. That is one emphasis. The other is the one implicit here: that there is such a thing as monstrous and scarlet sin; that it is the business of teachers and rulers to restrain it (as the rest of the chapter and of the book will emphasize); and that the '*rank growth of wickedness*' – to borrow a phrase from **James 1:21** – can reach a point where it is beyond all remedy. In Hosea that point is very near, and judgment must fall; but the punishment may yet produce a change of heart – a hope that runs through the book from the early chapters on the healing of the marriage to the final prospect of a blissful reunion in **chapter 14**.

H. D. Beeby: Our present age with its concern over the exploitation of natural resources and its care for the environment and for the preservation of existing species of beasts, birds, and fishes is well able to hear some of what Hosea is saying in **Hos. 4:3**. We know how human sin and greed go hand in hand with "*taking away*" (v. 3d) many of God's creatures. In fact, the link between morality and ecology we can forge with little difficulty. But part of the Church's mission is to announce that this link is dependent on the greater link: the link of faith in the covenant God. As in **Gen. 3** the trouble begins in the religious realm, so that in consequence nature is made to suffer. Can the Church not learn to say once more what Hosea is saying here, that often it is not that people perish because nature strikes but that nature is stricken because people are perishing through disobedience?

TEXT: Hosea 4:4-19

TITLE: REJECTION OF GOD'S WORD LEADS TO JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

CORRUPT RELIGIOUS LEADERS PROVOKE JUDGMENT FOR THE REJECTION OF GOD'S WORD

INTRODUCTION:

J. Andrew Dearman: Overall, **4:4–19** elaborates on the charge against the people in **4:1–3**, with the **priesthood** initially a major focus of attention (cf. **5:1**). The **spirit of harlotry** mentioned in **v. 12** is Hosea's characterization of the priesthood and the people in this section. The addressees are a priest (**4:4–6**), the priesthood (**4:7–10**), and the people (**4:11–19**).

Duane Garrett: Three times in this passage, in **4:6, 8, 12**, Hosea alludes to the name Lo-Ammi (“*not my people*”). In **v. 6** he declares that “*my people*” (*‘ammî*) perish for lack of sound teaching from the priests. In **v. 8** he declares that the priests feed upon the sins of “*my people*” (*‘ammî*). In **vv. 11–12** he asserts that the religious life of “*my people*” (*‘ammî*) consists in the most primitive form of superstition. But in **v. 4** he asserts that “*your people*” (that is, the priests’ people) can rightly blame the priests for their condition. The overall meaning is clear; the ordinary men and women of Israel, who should have been the pious people of God, had lost that status due to the greed and negligence of the priesthood. Instead, they had become the priests’ people.

David Malick: The LORD indicts the people of the nation for having no knowledge of Him since they will not listen to His teaching and are given over to idolatry **4:4-19**

- a. The nation has rejected knowledge, and forgotten the Law and will thus be rejected and forgotten by the LORD **4:4-6**
- b. The people sin against one another and direct one another into more sin, therefore they will be judged **4:7-10**
- c. The people of Israel are without understanding in that they are given over to idolatry **4:11-14**
- d. The people of Israel are warned not to go to holy cities and pollute them with their idolatry, but to remain alone unto their own judgment **4:15-19**

Allen Guenther: Outline

Indictment 1: Rejecting the Source of Knowledge, 4:4-6

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| 4:4-5 | I Wasn't Told |
| 4:6a | I Don't Want to Know |
| 4:6b-e | I Don't Remember |

Indictment 2: Perverting the Knowledge of God, 4:7-12a

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 4:7-8 | For Personal Gain |
| 4:9 | Priest and people Alike |

4:10-12a For Personal Pleasure

Indictment 3: Consorting with Lovers, 4:12b-19

4:12b-13a Prostitution by Choice
4:13b-14 Double Standards
4:15 Divine Counsel to Judah
4:16-17 Divine Appraisal of Israel
4:18-19 Partners in Shame

Five Accusing word pairs jolt the reader to attention:

<i>Let no one contend . . .</i>	<i>my contention / contending</i>
<i>You shall stumble . . .</i>	<i>the prophet shall stumble</i>
<i>I will destroy . . .</i>	<i>My people are destroyed</i>
<i>Because you have rejected . . .</i>	<i>I reject you from</i>
<i>Since you have forgotten . . .</i>	<i>I will forget</i>

A question and a protest seem to lie behind all three oracles in chapter four: “We are the covenant people, and do you say that we don’t know God? That’s not possible. We are doing exactly as the priests instruct us.”

I. (:4-6) REJECTING GOD’S WORD LEADS TO JUDGMENT ON BOTH THE PEOPLE AND THEIR CORRUPT RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Grace Emmerson: Whether the accusation is directed against an individual priest (vv. 4–6 are in the singular) or priests in general is unclear. The seriousness of the accusation and its far-reaching consequences (v. 6) suggest the latter, as do the plural verbs of vv. 7–8. There is no escape from Yahweh’s judgment.

ChatGPT: Israel’s sin is not merely personal but institutional. The priests, the leaders, and the people are all complicit in abandoning God’s standards.

In this context, the leaders (priests) failed to uphold God’s law, and Israel rejected correction, leading to a collapse in spiritual discernment and accountability.

A. (:4-5) Religious Leadership Actually Provoke Judgment

1. (:4a) Rationalizations and Excuses Lack Moral Standing

“Yet let no one find fault, and let none offer reproof;”

2. (:4b) Rejection of Counsel by the Priest Due to Stubbornness

“For your people are like those who contend with the priest.”

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The fourth verse suggests that a contention had arisen as to who was at fault for the people’s present predicament.

H. D. Beeby: Without hesitation Hosea points the accusing finger at the priest. If the fruits of the Covenant are missing, then the blame must be laid at the door of the Covenant-keeper par excellence, namely, the priest. Israel, the kingdom of priests (**Exod. 19:6**), can be priests to the world and to nature only if they themselves are properly priested. Unfortunately these keepers of the Covenant were following too closely in the footsteps of Aaron their “*father*” (**Exod. 32**). He had led Israel into idolatry rather than ensuring they remained faithful to the conditions of the Covenant.

3. (:5a) Rejection of Direction from the Prophets as Well Leading to Mutual Stumbling

*“So you will stumble by day,
And the prophet also will stumble with you by night;”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Unlike God, who has the authority and every justification to question his people, they have no moral basis to argue with anyone or to complain. In terms of its character, Israel is **stubborn**. The people are like “*those who contend with a priest*,” meaning that they are unwilling to heed a true word that might come from Yahweh’s representatives (cf. **Dt 17:12–13; Am 2:11–12**). So the people stumble in their sin (cf. **5:5; 14:1, 9**), and in this stumbling they are joined by the very religious leaders, the prophets, who were to have been their guides and models (cf., e.g., **Isa 3:2; 28:7; Jer 2:26; 23:9–40; Mic 3:5–8**).

David Allen Hubbard: **Stumble** (v. 5) is a favourite word in Hosea to describe the disasters that beset those who do not walk in God’s ways. The wayward fall on their faces so hard that it is impossible to get up without outside help (cf. **5:5; 14:1, 9**). The timing – priest by day and prophet by night – is not designated so much to distinguish between the falls as to indicate that either may stumble at any time, whether night (when one might expect it) or day (when one would ordinarily feel safe). The expression may be a **merism** in which contrasts of time are listed so as to cover the whole range of possibilities.

Robin Routledge: The metaphor of **stumbling** (*kāšal*) indicates failure to walk the right path. Elsewhere in Hosea, the people stumble because of sin (**5:5; 14:1, 9**). Here, that is traced back to priests and prophets: religious leaders who have collaborated in their support of corrupt cultic institutions, and so have failed to instruct the people in the ways of Yahweh. The nrsv reflects the mt: ‘*You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night*’, indicating the **continual failure** of those who should be providing spiritual leadership.

4. (:5b) Reality of Certain Destruction of Israel’s Institutions

“And I will destroy your mother.”

Duane Garrett: The “*mother*” is again the representation of institutional Israel, the entity that corrupts the ordinary people, the “*children*,” and that empowers the hierarchy. Destroying the “*mother*” refers to the overthrow of the power and prerogatives of the

religious leadership. In short, assertions that the clergy stumbles and that God is destroying their mother both imply destruction of Israel's institutions.

Robin Routledge: The action of corrupt leaders will result in the ruin of the nation. This is further linked to a lack of knowledge, which is a frequent theme in the book. In this context it refers to the knowledge of God (cf. **4:1; 6:6**) and continues the indictment of the priests, whose responsibility it was to instruct the people (cf. **Deut. 33:10; Mal. 2:6–7**).

B. (:6) Reason for Judgment = Lack of Knowledge Due to Rejecting God's Word

1. Judgment on the People

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

James Mays: The cause of that destruction is the lack of '*the knowledge*' (cf. the culminating charge of Yahweh's *rīb* in **4.1**). '*The knowledge*' is an abbreviated form of the expression '*the knowledge of God/Yahweh*'. Its content is clearly indicated by the parallelism with *tōrā* in this verse and the list of crimes against the law in **4.2**; '*knowledge*' is learning and obeying the will of the covenant God in devotion and faithfulness; it is response to the unity of Yahweh's saving act and binding requirement such as is expressed in '*I am Yahweh your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me ...*' (**Ex. 20.2ff.**). The lack of such knowledge had led to the loss of any reality in the role of being the covenant people. In Hosea's view of Israel's priesthood, the primary function of the office was to maintain and pass on the *tōrat 'elōhēkā*, instruction concerning the covenant God. *Tōrā* means both the act of instruction and the content of what is passed on.

2. Judgment on the Priesthood

a. For Rejecting Knowledge

*"Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest."*

James Mays: Their sin determines their punishment; what the priests have done to Yahweh, he will do to them. They reject his revelation; he rejects their priesthood. The father in office and the sons who would inherit the office (**I Sam. 2.27ff.**) are stripped of their ordination by the word of a lone prophet standing outside the organization of the official religion of the kingdom!

Gary Smith: God's response is to reciprocate by **rejecting the priests (4:6)**. He will ignore their children, just as the priests have ignored his words. There is a certain level of justice in God's action. You get what you deserve. God will repay each one for his or her deeds in an appropriate manner (**4:9**). He cannot bless the families of those priests who have purposely deserted him. The priests are doubly accountable because they have prevented the people from hearing about the personal relationship God wants to have with his people (**4:10**). The priests have even gotten involved with the drinking and prostitution going on at these temples. God will not reward these priests with any

blessings, but instead will send a curse. Yes, both the priests and the people will be punished severely by God (4:9).

b. For Forgetting the Law of God

*“Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.”*

Trent Butler: God's punishment is directed first of all toward the priests. God rejects the priests who are supposed to teach the people his word, because the priests have *forgotten* (NIV *ignored*) the law of your God. Parents were responsible to teach God's Torah to the people (**Deut. 33:10**). Priests had the professional responsibility to teach Torah (**Ezek. 7:26**). But God's people were not learning the truth from home or temple. So the God who remembers (**Lev. 26:42,45**) became the God who forgets. The priesthood was a family profession—children inherited the position from their fathers—but God would put a stop to that.

J. Andrew Dearman: To **forget something** means to fail to bring something to conscious focus or to ignore its significance, so that it no longer guides a person to the proper response. Correspondingly, if one **remembers**, then the matter is brought to mind in such a way that a proper response then ensues.

David Allen Hubbard: The magnitude of the priestly sin of omission, the failure to teach the law, is seen in its staggering consequences: the collapse of the priesthood (**vv. 4, 6c, e**) and the destruction of the nation (**vv. 5c–6a**). And the preciousness of the law to Yahweh is underscored by its comparison to the children of the priest (**v. 6d, e**).

II. (:7-10) RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION PERVERTS GLORY INTO SHAME

Anthony Petterson: The sacrificial system was God's gracious gift to deal with sin, and the priesthood had an honored status in overseeing it. But the priests perverted the sacrifices into something that served their own greed and so were a disgrace (see Eli's sons in **1Sa 2:12-17**). Both people and priests will be punished (**Hos 4:9**). God will hand them over to their sin, and they will not experience his covenant blessings (**4:10**).

A. (:7-8) Greedy Desires Lead to Compounding Corruption and Ultimate Shame

1. (:7a) Compounding the Sin = Their Decline

“The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me,”

Grace Emerson: The accusation here concerns not neglect of duty but abuse of privilege. The priests were entitled to a share in certain sacrifices (**Lev 6:26; 7:28–36**), but their **greed** had encouraged the proliferation of sacrifice to their own advantage. Yet the people, too, were not free of responsibility; *“people and priest will fare alike”* (**4:9, REB**), experiencing not fertility but futility.

Duane Garrett: “*The more the priests increased*” apparently refers to the fact that during a time of prosperity the number of people free to enter a religious vocation increases. Israel experienced such prosperity under Jeroboam II, and no doubt many considered the increased numbers of priests, their increased power, and the increased interest in formal worship to be signs of spiritual vitality. To the contrary, Hosea retorts, the more religious leadership the nation had, the worse they became.

David Allen Hubbard: The increase described in **verse 7** seems to be the numerical growth of the priesthood. Growth in numbers was matched by growth in sinfulness, since all priests were caught up in the sin of rejecting the law (v. 6). This multiplication of iniquity in the nation is evidently in proportion to the multiplication of the prosperity of the land in the reign of Jeroboam II. Instead of multiplying her devotion to God, Israel multiplies her self-reliant endeavours and, even worse, her dependence upon the Baals

2. (:7b) Changing Glory into Shame = Their Destiny
“I will change their glory into shame.”

3. (:8) Corrupting Both the People and the Priesthood = Their Desires
*“They feed on the sin of My people,
And direct their desire toward their iniquity.”*

Trent Butler: Apparently God changes his target here, and again, as in Hosea 4:6, he condemns the priests. They were encouraging Israel to bring sacrifices to the temple and were eating the priestly portions (**Lev. 7:28–38**). . .

The priests have sold their soul to do anything to cause Israel to bring more sinful offerings so the priests are getting richer and fatter. “*Soul*” here refers to the basic identity of the person and what he strives for in achieving such identity. The priests no longer gain identity from serving God. They set their aim on food and fortune.

Duane Garrett: [Hosea] regards the whole system of sacrifice as corrupted and of having lost its original intent. Instead of being a means of confession and grace, it had become a means of permissiveness for the people and of gluttony for the priests. In addition, the “*wickedness*” of the laity only increases the power of the religious professionals because the people's guilt gives the leaders a means of manipulation. Finally, the wickedness of their religion may also have included the practice of **sacred prostitution**. Decadent religious authority leads ironically to cheap grace and immorality as well as to domineering by a clergy that knows how to play upon the fear and superstition of a poorly instructed people.

James Mays: What is meant by saying that the priests make a living (lit. ‘*eat*’) off the guilt of Israel is seen from texts like **8.11, 13; 5.6**. The sacrifices offered on the many altars of the nation are sin in Yahweh's sight (cf. **Amos 4.4f.**); Yahweh rejects them because this cult of killing, burning, eating cattle has become the people's way of manipulating him, and has taken the place of devotion to him and knowledge of his

revelation (6.6). Worship by sacrifice has become in fact rupture of the covenant. What Yahweh rejects, the people love and the priests encourage. Since the officiating priest received a portion of the sacrificed animal, they had a vested interest in a prolific cult. Their profit has become the true goal of their vocation, and they have turned the institution of worship into a service to the clergy. What do they care about the old orthodoxy of Israel as the people of Yahweh, when religion abounds and priests prosper? The bizarre result is **a priest who officiates over sinning instead of nurturing true faith.**

David Thompson: These leaders pursue their iniquity at the expense of God's people. They make their living off of God's people and feed off of it. They were taking the offerings and the money and they just continued pursuing their own pagan lifestyle.

Wolff: The criticism of the cultic sacrifices is aimed at the selfish interests of the priests who in the sacrifices seek their own private gain. As in **verse 6a**, Yahweh, in the form of the messenger speech, again sympathetically takes the side of Israel, calling them anew "*My people!*" With their sacrificial cult, the priests do not serve the people of God with the divine gifts entrusted to them; instead, at the people's expense they store up their own profit and advantage.

Robin Routledge: Instead of helping them overcome sin, the priests revel in the people's failure. This may be because it served to increase the significance and status of the cult. There may also be a deliberate play on words. The first word for sin, *ḥaṭṭā't*, may also refer to the '*sin offering*' (**Andersen and Freedman** 1980: 342), which was offered to make atonement for some sins. As part of the ritual, the priests ate some of the sacrifice (e.g. **Lev. 6:24–29; 10:17–20**). Thus, the more the people sinned, the better the priests ate (cf. **1 Sam. 2:12–17**). This further reflects Hosea's view that the priesthood is intentionally **self-serving**.

B. (:9-10) Gloomy Destiny of Punishment and Futility for Religious Corruption

1. (:9) Punishment of Both People and Priests

*"And it will be, like people, like priest;
So I will punish them for their ways, And repay them for their deeds."*

Trent Butler: The priests sin and even cause the people to sin. God will dedicate his anointed priests to destruction. They will pay the price for their sinful ways and deeds. No profession or religious activity protects sinful people from God's punishment for sin.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The enigmatic proverbial saying "*like people, like priest*" communicates that the priests exhibit the same character as the nation and will endure a similar fate (**v.9**). This verse anticipates the attention that will be given to the religious leaders in the next chapter.

Derek Kidner: It is a saying about **judgment**: a warning that there will be no exemptions. No privilege will shelter this supposed élite. There is a strikingly similar prophecy in **Isaiah 24:1-3**, speaking of the end time, where the same Hebrew phrase,

‘*like people, like priest*’, heads a list (‘as with the slave, so with his master’, and so on) which demonstrates the **equal exposure** of us all to the day of God.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The idiom, *like people, like priest*, is a blunt reminder that people emulate their leaders. The Hebrew idiom can also be interpreted that priest and people will be judged. The construction does not indicate by itself who is being compared to whom. However, in the context, the focus is on the guilt of the priests who have misled God’s people. The tragedy was that the people were willing to be led in the wrong direction. But without a consistent teaching of the Law, there was no objective standard by which they could discern right from wrong.

2. (:10) Promise of Futility for Their Apostasy

*“And they will eat, but not have enough;
They will play the harlot, but not increase,
Because they have stopped giving heed to the LORD.”*

Robin Routledge: Because the priests have deserted Yahweh, their sinful pursuits will lead only to **frustration**.

Derek Kidner: The terms of the coming judgment, as initially announced in **verse 10**, are distinctly appropriate. Food and sex have been these priests’ obsession: food and sex will fail them, the one by shortage, the other by sterility – for it is a theme of Scripture and a fact of life that things material are precarious, and things merely sensual frustrating. Our Lord captured both these limitations in a single aphorism: ‘*Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again*’ (**Jn. 4:13**). Of course, to ‘*play the harlot*’ is a metaphor here for flirting with false gods; but it had a special aptness in view of the ritual fornication that was part of the attraction of these rivals, as **verse 14b** reminds us.

Trent Butler: The adulterous generation (**Hos. 4:2**) will continue their immoral ways of worship, but sexual relationships at the worship center will not lead God to fulfill his promise to multiply the population. God had promised to multiply or “*spread out*” his people (**Gen. 28:14**). He had fulfilled that promise in difficult times (**Exod. 1:12**), but he would cut off that promise in the time of greatest prosperity because the people and the priests had abandoned their devotion to God.

Duane Garrett: The end of **v. 10** can be translated, “*For they have abandoned keeping faith with Yahweh.*” In short, this summarizes all the misdeeds of the priesthood in a single line: they are **apostate**. Their failure to give sound teaching, their greed, and their promotion of sin are all at root rejection of God.

**III. (:11-14) RUINATION ATTRIBUTED TO HARLOTRY, WINE AND
ILLEGITIMATE WORSHIP – ALL ROOTED IN A LACK OF
UNDERSTANDING**

Gary Smith: The second charge explains how ignoring God's revelation is affecting the worship celebrations of the people. What is going on at the temples is astonishing: prostitution, drunkenness, idol worship, divination, and all the perversions that go with them. These activities do not help the people reflect on life's values, draw out rational conclusions about right and wrong, or please God. Instead, they "*take away the understanding of my people.*" These activities dull the mind so much that it is impossible for them truly to know Israel's God.

These practices describe the passionate sexuality of the Baal cult (some think such sexual activity will magically encourage Baal to give them fertility) and have nothing to do with maintaining a covenant relationship with Israel's true God. These practices lead people astray into unfaithful acts against God (4:12). Without proper teaching from Israel's priests, the population of Israel is filled with the "*spirit of prostitution*" and is blindly led away into a sensuous and selfish worldview that promotes debauchery rather than godliness.

Such worship does not take place at the temple of God, but at syncretistic Baalistic high places scattered throughout the countryside (Hos. 4:13; elsewhere these are mentioned in 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; Jer. 2:20). Here the people give their sacrifices to God/Baal (they apparently think these are two different names for the same god), enjoy the shade of the trees around these temples, and get involved with the sexual rites practiced at these outdoor places of worship. No doubt many who do this think they are reverencing God, being totally ignorant of what he actually requires in the Torah.

This paragraph ends with God's decision not to cast the primary blame on the young women (daughters and daughters-in-law) who are involved or who submit themselves to this sexual cultic activity at the Baal temples (Hos. 4:14). Instead, God will punish the men (probably older) who set up, promote, and probably demand this perverse sexual activity. These sexual relations with cult prostitutes are designed to stimulate the fertility gods so that they will send fertility and blessing to the participants, but Hosea concludes that they only leave the people "*without understanding*" and in "*ruin.*" Of course, this is not just a sexual perversity, for it is all done in the name of and for the honor of the Canaanite gods.

A. (:11) Lack of Understanding Due to Prostitution and Drinking

"Harlotry, wine, and new wine take away the understanding."

Grace Emmerson: This section begins and ends with proverbial sayings on the causes and dangers respectively of **lack of understanding**; the latter, "*a people so devoid of understanding comes to grief*" (REB), is enlivened with alliteration (*'am lo' yabin yillabet*). The theme of what follows is not drunkenness per se but the resultant insensitivity which delights in promiscuity. The designation of Israel as "*my people*" (4:12) highlights the irony of Israel's search for guidance from a wooden idol. Metaphorical and nonmetaphorical uses of "promiscuity" are interwoven. Unfaithfulness to Yahweh, their covenant God, issues in sexual impurity.

Anthony Petterson: A key contribution to their sinful abandoning of the Lord and giving themselves to promiscuity was their excessive alcohol consumption; they lost their ability to think rationally (v. 11).

Trent Butler: God summarizes the people's new identity. Prostitution and drinking occupy their thoughts. They enjoyed Baal worship because it brought great physical pleasure. Israel sold out their history and their nation and its future for a good time in the here and now. The people have rejected knowledge. Now their indulgences dull their mental capacities so they can no longer receive knowledge.

B. (:12-13) Illegitimate Worship Associated with Harlotry

David Allen Hubbard: Within the envelope [the parallel proverbial sayings of v. 11 and v. 14e] are three illustrations of Israel's dementedness.

- First, they seek revelation from wooden objects (v. 12). Wood could be a pillar (perhaps with phallic significance) or a sacred tree (cf. v. 13); staff might be smaller pieces of wood to be cast like dice and lots, or a larger rod to be spun and dropped to convey a message by the direction in which it landed – an act of rhabdomancy. In any case magic and even idolatry were involved and drew divine ire (**Deut. 18:1–14**), for they needed to inquire (Heb. *š'ʾl*; cf. **Judg. 1:1; 2 Sam. 2:1; Ezek. 21:26**) of God who alone knew the future, who alone could give oracles (Heb. *ngd*). Such acts were rejections of true prophecy (cf. 9:7 for its explication).
- Second, the Israelites are so engrossed in idolatry that they are under the sway, not of Yahweh whom they have left (Heb. preposition *mittaḥat* means 'from under the authority of' and is equivalent to *mē'āḥārēy*, literally 'from [following] after' in 1:2), but of a spirit whose character causes them to wander wildly into acts of harlotry (v. 12c– d). Spirit comes close to describing demonic power and indicates how virtually inescapable Israel's harlotry with the Baals had become (cf. 4:19; 5:4). Harlotry dots this section of the book and links it tightly to the theme verse (1:2) and the descriptions of Gomer/Israel as harlot in 2:2–13; 3:1–2 (cf. 4:10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18; 5:3, 4).

Their two prime activities were slaying and eating sacrifices (Heb. *zbḥ* is always used negatively by Hosea to signify the activities of the corrupt cult; cf. 4:14; 8:13; 11:2; 12:12; 13:2) and burning incense and other offerings (on Heb. *qtr*, see 2:13; 11:2). The places for these exercises were the elevated sites that seemed closer to the heavens and were shaded by trees which Israel deemed sacred. . .

- Third, one of the rude results (note the *therefore* of v. 13e) of the priests' infidelity to God was the **promiscuous sexual conduct of their own daughters and daughters-in-law** (the Heb. *kallâ*, 'bride', can describe both 'daughter' and 'daughter-in-law' who have preserved their virginity until the time of marriage;

cf. Wolff, pp. 86–87).⁹ The lascivious cult had caught them in its clutches, and, under the welcome shade of the trees just described, they engaged in illicit intercourse..

Lloyd Ogilvie: The theme of stubbornness and straying is consistent throughout **Hosea 4:12–19**. The “*spirit of harlotry*” leads God’s people astray. It is as if an overwhelming force of evil came upon the people from beyond them, and they were prompted to stray.

1. (:12) Substituting Idols for God

*“My people consult their wooden idol,
and their diviner's wand informs them;
For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray,
And they have played the harlot, departing from their God.”*

Anthony Petterson: vv. 12–14 – The people have forsaken the Lord and turned to idols. They seek to determine the future in ways that the law prohibits (cf. **Dt 18:9–13**), and they engage in the sacrificial rituals of foreign nations. This is consistent with the people’s worship of Baal (**Hos 2:8, 13, 16–17**). The people also give themselves to sexual immorality (**4:13**). The men bear greater culpability in this, presumably because of the responsibility they have been given, from creation, to lead their wives (v. 14).

2. (:13) Sacrificing on the High Places

*“They offer sacrifices on the tops of the mountains
And burn incense on the hills, Under oak, poplar, and terebinth,
Because their shade is pleasant.
Therefore your daughters play the harlot,
And your brides commit adultery.”*

Duane Garrett: The closing of the poem, that the shade is “good” where they worship, is not an accidental comment but implies that the cults were in some ways truly appealing to the average person. In order to appreciate fully the lament concerning their going to hills and shade trees to offer sacrifices, we need to understand how this activity could be attractive. The “sacrifices” were not simply for the gods but were eaten by human participants. In a beautiful setting in the hills and under trees, the people could experience something that combined a picnic with “sacred mysteries.” Also in these mountain shrines they enjoyed freedom from the restraints of the strict morality imposed by orthodox Yahwism (thus Josiah found it necessary to close down all rural shrines, **2 Kgs 23:8–9**). This, combined with a belief that these gods and their rites had the power to insure good crops and healthy births in their flocks and herds, made for a religion as irresistible as it was corrupting. The real tragedy, however, was not merely that these rites led to various kinds of immorality; it was that people went to the shrines and consulted trees and stones with a sense of piety and reverence.

C. (:14a) Liability for Harlotry Assigned to the Men

*“I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot
Or your brides when they commit adultery,*

*For the men themselves go apart with harlots
And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes;”*

David Thompson: God says I won’t even punish the daughters or the brides because it is the men and the false leaders who are promoting all of this. God’s people were being ruined because the male leadership refused to lead the people into the pure, true, right ways of God.

This is interesting to me because in our social world, generally speaking, men’s sins are treated more leniently than a woman’s sin. But it doesn’t work that way in God’s world. God will hold the men accountable and specifically He will hold the male leadership accountable

D. (:14b) Lack of Understanding Leads to Ruin

“So the people without understanding are ruined.”

James Mays: The final line (v. 14b) returns to the proverbial idiom. In style and vocabulary the line is a general Wisdom saying (cf. **Prov. 10.8, 10**). But this observation, which uttered independently would sound like a calm, dispassionate analysis of the way life works, in this context takes on the quality of **a lament over inevitable doom**. A saying of the wise becomes an announcement of doom. The proverb completes the logic of the oracle:

- harlotry takes away the mind (v. 11),
- the nation is caught up by a spirit of harlotry (vv. 12–14a),
- the resulting lack of understanding will lead to ruin (14b).

Robin Routledge: The priests’ failure results in a widespread **lack of understanding**. The term *bîn* may apply to discernment generally, though probably refers here to the understanding of who God is and what he requires (cf. 14:9; see also e.g. **Isa. 6:9–10; 43:10; 56:11; Jer. 4:22**). This is closely related to the failure to acknowledge him (2:8; 4:1, 6). The result of the people’s lack of understanding is ruin (cf. 4:6). The priests have failed to show true leadership; that, though, is no excuse, and the whole people face divine judgment.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Reflecting on the results of the spirit of harlotry on His people, the Lord sighs: *“So the people without understanding are ruined”* (v. 14). *Ruined*, literally, “*thrown down*” (Hebrew, *labat*), is a word found elsewhere only in **Proverbs 10:8, 10**, where it describes the inevitable end of a fool who rejects God’s commandments. In light of the scene that has been pictured in these verses, Israel has been “*ruined*” through her own folly.

IV. (:15-19) REMEDY FOR JUDAH REQUIRES RENOUNCING THE SHAMEFUL CORRUPTION OF ISRAEL

James Mays: The general subject of Israel's cult as harlotry, the central theme of vv. 4–10 and 11–14, continues. There are clear connections with the particular emphases of the two foregoing passages. An irrational hardening of mind has fallen on Israel. Drunkenness and sex dominate their worship. They are captive to a spirit which drives them toward their fall.

Gary Smith: They are out of control and hopelessly determined to do whatever they want to do. The essential reasons for this hopeless situation are:

- (1) The people are spellbound by the idols that join with other forms of Baalism (4:17);
- (2) they deeply love the wine and the sexual prostitution at their temples (4:18); and
- (3) they are bound up by the adulterous spirit of their day (4:19).

A. (:15-17) Shepherding Counsel

1. (:15) Warning to Judah

*"Though you, Israel, play the harlot, Do not let Judah become guilty;
Also do not go to Gilgal, Or go up to Beth-aven,
And take the oath: 'As the LORD lives!'"*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The hope is that Israel's example will be an object lesson for Judah, so that the people might not repeat Israel's corruption and avoid similar punishment. . .

What is made plain here is that proclaiming the correct name of God is not the only requirement for worship to be acceptable; more important is the content given that name. If the people believe in and praise a Yahweh of their own creation, whether he is confused with ba'al or is shaped by the reigning nationalistic ideology, he cannot be the true God and worship cannot be authentic. In sum, the religious world of ancient Israel is complex. One must appreciate that syncretism necessarily corrupts faith and distorts their understanding of the person and work of Yahweh.

David Thompson: Gilgal and Beth-aven were two pagan cult sites. In fact, the name "Bethel" means "House of God" and the name "Beth-aven" means "House of Wickedness." God did not want them going to these false places of evil worship and taking oaths like Israel.

Lloyd Ogilvie: At these sanctuaries the people swear, "*As Yahweh lives,*" and then enter the sanctuary to become part of the cultic worship. The name of Yahweh was used with syncretistic deceit when the people knew very well that Baal was worshiped there (**Jer. 4:2; 5:2**).

2. (:16-17) Waywardness of Israel Due to Stubbornness

*"Since Israel is stubborn Like a stubborn heifer,
Can the LORD now pasture them Like a lamb in a large field?
Ephraim is joined to idols; Let him alone."*

Duane Garrett: The fundamental charge in these verses is that Israel is incorrigible in its evil ways. This is shown (1) in the simile of the stubborn heifer, (2) in their unbreakable attachment to idols, and (3) in their habitual debauchery of drunkenness and promiscuity. A stubborn heifer was a cow that refused to go where her owner led (cf. **Jer 31:18**). The stubbornness of the people made it impossible for God to give them peace and prosperity. The line “*Ephraim is joined to idols*” (which implies that Israel has formed a political alliance with idols) could instead be rendered, “*Ephraim is spellbound of idols.*” The latter interpretation implies that Israel is bewitched by idols, and it is preferable. Following such an interpretation, “*Leave him alone!*” implies that the nation is in a trance from which no one may arouse them.

James Mays: The cult of Israel’s shrines is to be avoided because those who assemble in them are stubbornly committed to their folly. Like a **balky cow** which always bucks and plunges in the direction opposite to that in which she is pushed, Israel perversely resists every attempt of Yahweh to guide them. For a similar metaphor, cf. Jeremiah’s ‘*untrained calf*’ (**Jer. 31.18**). Hardening of mind and spirit has set in. Yahweh can no longer shepherd his people, leading them to the pleasant and verdant places where pasture is abundant.

David Allen Hubbard: However much God would like to shepherd Israel with his wisdom, it seems he must, because of her continual intransigence, treat her as those dumb animals which will not respond to their master. . .

Ephraim (v. 17), one of Hosea’s favourite designations for Israel, is used here for the first time. Technically, it describes both the most influential tribe in the Northern Kingdom (cf. **Josh. 16:5–10** for the land originally allotted to the descendants of this son of Joseph in **Gen. 48:1–7**) and the hill territory that it occupied, which may have been Hosea’s home. Used by itself or in clear parallelism with Israel, it seems to stand for the whole northern people (cf. **11:1, 3, 8, 9; 12:8**)

B. (:18-19) Shameful Conduct Drives Them to Shameful Judgment

*“Their liquor gone, They play the harlot continually;
Their rulers dearly love shame.
The wind wraps them in its wings,
And they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.”*

Duane Garrett: The NIV translation of v. **18a** implies that the people continued to engage in promiscuity, even when sober and not under the inhibition-removing effects of alcohol. This probably is not correct; the line seems to mean, “*When their liquor runs out, they engage prostitutes,*” meaning that they drink all they can and then turn to sex.

Trent Butler: God seeks to stop sin so its contagious nature will not infect Judah as it has Israel. Hosea prays that his own people in the nation of Judah will not follow the example of their northern kinsmen. Surely, God will have a remnant of his people who will be faithful and not fall into the Canaanite trap. Gilgal was Israel's first place of worship after Joshua brought the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the

promised land (**Josh. 5:9–10**). But it was no longer a place holy to the Lord. Neither was Bethel, sarcastically spelled Beth Aven (“*house of disaster or of injustice*”), in spite of its many connections with the patriarchs (**Gen. 28:19**). These were not the places God had chosen for his people to worship.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: A “*wind*” (*rûah*; GK 8120) confines Israel. This word is the same one translated “*spirit*” in **v.12**, but in contrast to those deeply controlling and destructive impulses that are driving the nation, here it denotes the **unstoppable force of divine judgment** (cf. **13:15**). The people’s misdirected sacrifices (**4:13**; cf. **2:11, 13**) cannot secure bounty or protection; they bring only shame and suffering. These offerings will be exposed as useless before the sovereign person of Yahweh, his holy demands, and his powerful actions in history.

John Goldingay: The chapter closes (**vv. 18b–19**) with a tricolon whose reference to “*its shields*” (that is, the people who are supposed to be the protectors of the city) begins the transition to the next section, with its challenge to the **Ephraimite leadership**. These shields have behaved as if they are emotionally attached to shame or slighting (cf. **v. 7**). The implication of their behavior is that it’s going to take them to this fate. It’s as if they have been bewitched. The whoring spirit that has led the people astray (**v. 12**), to which Hosea will refer again in **5:4**, has bound them up in its wings. He is playing with the fact that *rûah* also denotes the wind, which (as it were) has wings (**Pss. 18:10 [11]; 104:3**) that enable it to carry someone away. They will carry the shields to the shame that properly issues from their offering sacrifices to these other deities. They will not merely be ashamed but also shamed.

Robin Routledge: The people are in the grip of false worship and must bear the shameful consequences of their idolatrous sacrifices. Wind may also be an instrument of divine judgment (e.g. **13:15**), which, when linked to Israel being swept away, may suggest exile (**Ben Zvi** 2005: 107–108; cf. **Macintosh** 1997: 173–174). The people’s sin, which now controls them, will carry them ultimately to destruction.

Duane Garrett: The thrust of this passage is therefore that Judah should not follow Israel into apostasy and promiscuity. The people of Judah should abandon religious shrines and practices of Israel because they had become hopelessly defiled by paganism. The Israelites were like a stubborn cow in their apostasy—entranced by idols, debauched, in love with their cults, but destined to be swept away as by a storm and to be sadly disappointed by the failure of their gods.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do religious leaders serve themselves rather than faithfully shepherd and instruct God’s people?

- 2) Why was there so much prostitution and illicit sex associated with the worship of pagan gods?
- 3) What am I doing to promote the accurate and full knowledge of the Lord that leads to righteous conduct and acceptable worship?
- 4) How can we learn valuable lessons from the spiritual adultery and illegitimate worship of others?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Allen Hubbard: In this section the focus narrows from the people as a whole, with whom Yahweh has sharp controversy, to the **priests** – especially the **high priest** – who regulate the cult and interpret its terms to the people (cf. **4:4, 6, 9; 5:1** for specific references to the priests). The crimes mentioned here are entirely fitting to this sacerdotal context:

- (1) failure to teach the law (**4:6**);
- (2) use of the cult to feed their own appetites (**4:7–10**);
- (3) practice of forms of divination (**4:12**);
- (4) offering of sacrifices at the high-places (**4:13a**);
- (5) participation in ritual orgies of sex (**4:13b–14**);
- (6) encouragement of drunken lewdness in connection with idol worship (**4:17–19**);
- (7) false trust in the sacrifices at the shrines (**5:6**); and
- (8) bearing of bastard children as the fruit of the pagan orgies (**5:7**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: In the twenty-first century, we have our own set of **idols** that we stubbornly stray toward for worship. Money, security, pleasure, people, careers, and possessions are still idols that demand our loyalty. Again, our idols can be anything or anyone that threatens to occupy the throne of our hearts. God-substitutes can be very demanding of our time and money.

And our **stubbornness** is expressed in the most subtle ways. We juggle our idols while at the same time expressing our commitment to God. We set our priorities for our personal goals, our images, our families, and our future plans; then we not only ask God to bless them, but to help us achieve them. We try to keep the Lord in the idol-polishing and maintenance business!

But our stubborn self is the most dangerous diminutive god. While we say we are Christians, attend church, pray our prayers, and become involved in a few good works, **we still control our lives**. We only need God for Him to accomplish our predetermined plans and purposes.

Gary Smith: The centrality of the Word of God for spiritual leaders. When a people fail to follow God, it is always instructive to ask why. What did they do to displease God? Why did they miss the mark of doing what God requires? How can we learn from this incident so that we do not make the same mistakes (**1 Cor. 10:11**)?

In **Hos. 4:4–10** Hosea explains one of the main reasons why the people in Israel were rejected by God. It was fundamentally a problem of **not knowing God as their covenant Lord**. If one were to ask why this had happened, the answer is clear. Israel's problem arose because the priests (and to some extent the prophets) were **not teaching God's words of wisdom from the Torah** (the five books of Moses). Although this might not be the reason for God's rejection of every group of people throughout history (some know God's words but do not follow them), several basic principles are established that serve as a warning to all spiritual leaders.

Of all the roles a pastor or any other spiritual leader has, the undergirding role is to help people know God (**4:6**). Israel's experience demonstrates that any acknowledgment of God as Lord is nearly impossible if spiritual leaders ignore God's revelation in the Bible. A leader will then tend to substitute some other "good" human cause that is culturally attractive but not nearly as important as the glorification of God (**4:7**). Jesus knew that the giving of charity and praying to God were "good" things, but he condemned the Pharisees who did not exhibit the more important characteristic of righteousness (**Matt. 6:1–7**). Eventually these "small" things lead to a perversion that destroys the true faith and involves people in things that God rejects (**Hos. 4:10**).

The powerfully persuasive warning throughout **4:4–10** is that God will destroy those teachers and preachers who reject him and lead his people astray. God's disapproval of false prophets who give dreams and false messages in his name is reported in **Jeremiah 5:12–13; 14:14–15; 23:9–40**. Jesus condemns the hypocritical Jewish teachers of his day in **Matthew 23**, and James warns about the serious responsibility of teachers (**James 3:1**). As **Proverbs 29:18** says, where there is no revelation from God, the people perish.

The perversion of worship. The results of bad teaching nearly always show up in the way people worship God (**Hos. 4:11–14**). If God is not presented as Redeemer, no one will come to him for forgiveness. If God is not seen as the Sovereign King of the universe, people will not honor and revere him as divine Lord, but will treat him as a casual buddy. If no one knows what God hates and is ignorant of what pleases him, it is not surprising if people do things that are contrary to his revealed will.

When people do not know God, they tend to do whatever seems culturally or socially acceptable. In Hosea's day that meant following the socially acceptable practices at the Baal temples. How could people go so wrong as to accept excessive drinking, idol worship, prostitution, and sacrifices to gods other than Israel's God? The simple explanation is that everyone around them was doing it; it was the cultural norm. If this principle is carried over to worship in churches today, the question we should be asking is: To what extent have our cultural norms determined what we do at church? What

music, activities, messages, and methods do we use that do not glorify God but are done anyway since they seem so right? . . .

Dealing with stubborn rebellion. The final paragraph (**4:15–19**) warns what can happen to any person or group who rejects God. Once a sinful perception of reality is viewed as normative and acceptable, it is difficult to bring about change. Stubborn persistence based on what people believe to be the truth can so blind our eyes that it is almost impossible to see the light. If my parents did it this way, if this is denominational policy, if this is what makes me comfortable, if this is something I think is okay, then it is hard to conceive of this action as a bad thing that God hates. When these perspectives become the keys to judging the normativity of anything, one has already lost the battle. It becomes a waste of time to lead people in a different way, for there is no ultimate authority (**4:16**).

The frightening fact is that some people can become so drawn into false religious beliefs that God seems to give up on them (cf. **4:17** with **Rom. 1:18–32**). In such cases about all one can do is to warn other individuals about not being involved with these sorts of people (**Hos. 4:15**) and to encourage friends to stay away from the places of deception. Eventually a time may come where thoroughly deceived people must be left to their perverse ways until the shame of their ways finally catches up to them (**4:18–19**).

TEXT: Hosea 5:1-15

TITLE: INEVITABILITY OF JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT IS INEVITABLE BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S HARLOTRY AND GOD'S HOLY WRATH

INTRODUCTION:

Derek Kidner: For several chapters now the picture will be building up by fragments, coming at the subject from all kinds of angles. By its very disjointedness the style suits the chaotic situation it addresses. Here and there in this chapter some belated stirrings of national alarm will be detected; but what action it will lead to is quite another matter. How deep or shallow is the change of mood will be the question particularly faced in **chapter 6**. Meanwhile God's exposure of His people and of what must happen to them continues in a hail of strong and lively metaphors. . .

There is no pretence here that reconciliation can be easy, or penitence a mere gesture of apology. The whole book is, from one angle, a study of what it means to turn back to God. So in this passage the nation is confronted with two unconsidered facts:

- the stranglehold of its own habits,
- and the hiddenness of God for worshippers who are insincere.

David Malick: The LORD indicts the leaders of Israel and Judah for their evil leadership which has led the people into the deep sin of idolatry and no knowledge of the LORD (**5:1-15**)

- a. The LORD sees that the spiritual and political leaders of Israel have led the people on both sides of the Jordan and Judah into the sin of idolatry without knowledge of the LORD which will result in judgment **5:1-7**
- b. The LORD will bring about judgment in Israel and in Judah for their political crimes (in going to Assyria) against Him **5:8-15**

Trent Butler: God's sinful people neither know nor seek to worship him, so they must face destruction and isolation from him until they are willing to admit their guilt and turn back to worship him.

(:1a) ALERT! TARGETED JUDGMENT

*"Hear this, O priests! Give heed, O house of Israel! Listen, O house of the king!
For the judgment applies to you,"*

Gary Smith: The threefold summons to "hear . . . pay attention . . . listen" (**5:1**) indicates that an important statement is to follow.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: “*Hear*,” “*Give heed*,” and “*Listen*” are the imperative **watchwords** by which the prophet hopes to alert the priests, the people (“*house of Israel*”), and the politicians (“*house of the king*”) that the judgment of captivity applies to them. The definite article in Hebrew is prefixed to the word *judgment* (Hebrew, *mishpat*), which makes it all the more certain that the judgment about to fall upon Israel is that which was promised if the covenant was broken (**Lev. 28:14-46; Deut. 28:15-68**). Hosea’s main target of attack is once again the **leadership** (specifically the priests), who have been guilty of ensnaring and netting the people in sin.

Biblehub.com: The **priests** in ancient Israel were responsible for leading the people in worship and maintaining the spiritual health of the nation. This call to the priests indicates their failure in their duties, as they were expected to be the mediators between God and the people. The rebuke suggests a corruption or negligence in their spiritual leadership, which is a recurring theme in the prophetic books (e.g., **Malachi 2:1-9**).

The “*house of Israel*” refers to the northern kingdom, which had separated from Judah after Solomon’s reign. This phrase emphasizes the collective responsibility of the nation, highlighting that the entire community is implicated in the wrongdoing. The prophets often addressed the nation as a whole to call them back to covenant faithfulness (e.g., **Amos 3:1**).

The **royal house** refers to the monarchy, likely the ruling dynasty of the northern kingdom. This call to the royal house underscores the accountability of the leaders, who were expected to govern according to God’s laws. The failure of the kings to lead righteously often led the nation into idolatry and injustice (e.g., **1 Kings 16:30-33**).

The **judgment** mentioned here is a divine pronouncement of impending punishment due to the nation’s sins. The prophets frequently delivered messages of judgment as a means to call the people to repentance. This judgment is not arbitrary but is a response to specific covenant violations (e.g., **Deuteronomy 28:15-68**).

Allen Guenther: Each command addresses a separate defendant. They have all been charged with unfaithfulness in the preceding accusation oracles. Priests, people, and royal house: the categories represent the cross section of Israelite society: the religious establishment, the population as a whole, and the king, army, and political and administrative branches of government.

I. (:1b-7) JUDGMENT IS INEVITABLE BECAUSE OF ISRAEL’S HARLOTRY

Gary Smith: **Verses 1–7** explain why God holds Israel’s leaders accountable for the nation’s promiscuous acts. . . Continuing his judicial imagery from the courtroom, Hosea describes how God as judge will bring his verdict of “guilty” on the leaders of Israel (political and spiritual, see **v. 1**) because the people do not have a personal knowledge of God. This verdict includes an announcement of war (**vv. 8–11**) and a final

series of bold images of God's judgment on his people. Within these judgments on Israel, Hosea indicates that God will also destroy the nation of Judah (vv. 5b, 10, 12b, 13, 14).

A. (:1b-2) Deep Depravity

*"For you have been a snare at Mizpah,
And a net spread out on Tabor.
And the revolters have gone deep in depravity,
But I will chastise all of them."*

Allen Guenther: Guilty! All three groups are guilty as charged.

Priests! You were a trap at Mizpah.

People! A net is spread out on Mt. Tabor.

Ruling class! Rebels are deep in slaughter.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The towns mentioned were sites of the syncretistic or Canaanite cult worship. Mizpah is probably the Mizpah of Benjamin, nine miles north of Jerusalem. Excavations there have uncovered numerous Astarte statuettes from the eighth century B.C., showing that the fertility cult was active there. Tabor is a mountain on the northeastern edge of the Jezreel Valley, and was another cult site. Shittim is alluded to in verse two. The point is that cult worship had spread across the land.

Biblehub.com: **Mizpah** was a significant location in Israel's history, often associated with gatherings for national decision-making or worship (e.g., **1 Samuel 7:5-6**). The reference to a "*snare*" suggests that the leaders have turned a place of potential spiritual renewal into one of entrapment, possibly through idolatry or false worship practices.

Mount Tabor is another significant site, known for its strategic location and its role in Israel's military history (e.g., **Judges 4:6**). The imagery of a "*net*" implies deception and entrapment, indicating that the leaders have ensnared the people in sin, leading them away from true worship. This metaphor highlights the leaders' culpability in leading the nation astray.

The rebels are deep in slaughter -- This phrase indicates a profound level of rebellion and sin among the people. The term "*rebels*" refers to those who have turned away from God's commandments, often associated with idolatry and moral corruption. The word "*deep*" suggests that their actions are not superficial but entrenched and pervasive. In the historical context of Hosea, Israel was engaged in alliances with foreign nations and worship of their gods, leading to spiritual and physical violence. The "*slaughter*" can be understood both literally, as in acts of violence and bloodshed, and metaphorically, representing the spiritual death resulting from their apostasy. This echoes the warnings found in **Deuteronomy 28**, where disobedience to God leads to curses, including violence and destruction.

but I will chastise them all -- Here, God declares His intention to discipline the people. The word "*chastise*" implies correction and punishment with the aim of bringing about

repentance and restoration. This reflects God's justice and mercy, as He does not abandon His people but seeks to correct them. The use of "all" indicates that no one is exempt from this divine discipline, emphasizing the comprehensive nature of God's judgment. This is consistent with the theme of divine retribution found throughout the prophetic books, such as in **Amos 3:2**, where God states that He will punish Israel for their iniquities.

David Allen Hubbard: Andersen's translation (p. 380) follows NIV: '*The rebels* (Heb. *šwt*, 'to wander' or 'revolt'; cf. **Job 1:7; 2:2; Num. 5:12**) are deep in 'slaughter', and his interpretation, with considerable cogency, sees the crime as nothing less than child-sacrifice, on the basis of the use of 'slaughter' in **Isaiah 57:5** and **Ezekiel 16:21; 23:39**; cf. **Genesis 22:10** – Abraham and Isaac!

James Mays: Using three images from the techniques of hunting, Yahweh scornfully accuses his ministers of making a quarry of others instead of being their protectors and benefactors. The **trap** (*pah*) was a device made of two spring nets which when triggered came together to catch birds (cf. **Amos 3.5**). The **net** (*rešet*) was placed along paths or in the forest to entangle its quarry. The **pit** was a covered hole which gave way when an animal walked on it. The offices of religion and government were established to save and protect the people, but these leaders have instead been like snares that catch and imprison.

Robin Routledge: The main emphasis appears to be that the nation's leaders, who should be guarding and protecting the people, are preying on them.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Although God's holiness is vindicated in Ephraim's day of rebuke, His love and mercy are again seen (cf. **5:2**) in the word *rebuke* (Hebrew, *tokechah*; literally, "reproof, correction"), which signifies discipline with the goal of **restoration**.

B. (:3-4) Defiling Deeds

H. D. Beeby: The **knowledge of God**, in two senses, binds these verses together and further emphasizes the links with **ch. 4**. The verses begin with God's knowledge of his people (an obvious assumption underlying **5:1–2**), and they end with Israel's loss of the knowledge of God. Two kinds of knowledge of God are the bread of this sandwich, and what lies between? The meat of the sandwich is a description of Israel and its leaders without the knowledge of God—an Israel playing the harlot, defiled, and unable to repent and return to God. The description also includes a positive reason why Israel cannot know the God of Israel. It is because the people have changed their God for an idol—the spirit of harlotry. This new god is not only an external deity demanding obedience, but it has become internalized and taken full control. The expulsive power of a new knowledge has driven out the knowledge of God, leaving falsehood to rule.

David Allen Hubbard: These verses are framed by another envelope pattern: *I* (Yahweh; cf. **v. 2**) *know* [you], *Ephraim* (see below for vocative) in **verse 3a** is both paralleled by

and contrasted with and *they know not Yahweh* in **verse 4c**. The ignorance and rejection which mark Israel's and Ephraim's (again the east and west districts of the kingdom) relations to God are more than matched by Yahweh's full acquaintance with their harlotry/idolatry.

1. Exposure of Sin Causing Defilement

*"I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me;
For now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot,
Israel has defiled itself."*

Biblehub.com: The **defilement** of Israel signifies moral and spiritual corruption. This defilement results from their idolatrous practices and abandonment of God's laws. **Leviticus 18:24-30** warns against defilement through idolatry and immorality, highlighting the consequences of such actions. The defilement also foreshadows the eventual judgment and exile that Israel would face due to their persistent unfaithfulness.

Allen Guenther: The Lord's verdict comes from his total knowledge of his people. Motives, attitudes, and actions alike have come under his scrutiny. The past and the present are an open book before him. The secret sins of individuals as well as families, social groups, and nation cannot be concealed.

Trent Butler: The citizens of Israel thought they could live any way they pleased and not be found out. God had to remind them of the extent of his knowledge. He knew everything they did and said and thought and planned. Nothing escaped him. They could not hide. Ephraim has engaged in prostitution in the fertility cults of Baal. Thus Israel is corrupt or defiled, no longer pure and clean, and no longer eligible to enter the holy place where God is worshipped (**2 Chr. 23:19**).

2. Estrangement from God

"Their deeds will not allow them To return to their God."

Biblehub.com: This phrase highlights the concept of sin as a **barrier to reconciliation** with God. In the context of Hosea, Israel's actions, particularly idolatry and social injustice, have created a separation from God. The deeds refer to the persistent sinful behaviors that have become habitual, making repentance difficult. This echoes the biblical principle found in **Isaiah 59:2**, where iniquities create a separation between people and God. The historical context of Hosea involves a time of moral and spiritual decline in Israel, where the worship of Baal and other Canaanite deities was prevalent, leading to a departure from the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Robin Routledge: It is significant here that, while earlier the priests were indicted for leading the people astray, the people are, nevertheless, held accountable for their own actions.

3. Exchange of Covenant Relationship for Idolatry

"For a spirit of harlotry is within them,

And they do not know the LORD.”

Biblehub.com: In the Hebrew context, "to know" implies an intimate, covenantal relationship, not merely intellectual awareness. Israel's failure to know the LORD indicates a breakdown in their covenant relationship, characterized by disobedience and ignorance of God's laws and character. This is a recurring theme in the prophetic literature, where knowing God is equated with living in accordance with His will (**Jeremiah 9:23-24**). Theologically, this points to the necessity of a heart transformation, as seen in the New Covenant promise of **Jeremiah 31:33-34**, where God writes His law on the hearts of His people, enabling them to truly know Him.

James Mays: This uncleanness of Israel is a far more radical contamination than any cultic disqualification that can be corrected by ritual purification or atonement. Israel's defilement involves a paralysis of soul. They are held prisoner in the grip of the deeds of their past. These 'deeds' (**4.9; 7.2; 9.15; 12.2**) are the fateful blunders during Israel's history in the land (cf. **6.7ff.; 9.1 off.**) which have shaped their character so totally that they are surrounded by these deeds like an insurmountable wall (**7.2**). A spirit of harlotry (cf. **4.12**) is at work among the people; they are possessed by a charisma that comes from Baal and his cult. As a result they do not know Yahweh nor can they return to him.

Duane Garrett: The Bible holds two truths in tension: first, that repentance is always a possibility, and second, that corruption can so enslave a soul that repentance becomes a practical impossibility. This verse focuses on the latter truth. As **Wolff** comments, "Total apostasy takes away freedom." Long years of training in paganism had had its effect; the nation had become unable to return to Yahweh. The point that they no longer knew God looks back to the original indictment on the nation, that it lacked the knowledge of God (**4:1**). We should note that Hosea uses a number of catchwords to link v. 4 to v. 3. God knows about them (v. 3), but they do not know him (v. 4); Ephraim led them into prostitution (v. 3), and a spirit of prostitution now filled their hearts (v. 4); they were unclean (v. 3), and thus they could not enter God's presence (v. 4).

C. (:5-7) Desperate Downfall

Matthew Black: The Result of Bad Leadership

- A People who don't know the Lord (**5:4b**)
- A People enslaved sin (**5:5**)
- A People without Fellowship with God (**5:6**)
- A People without Faith in God (**5:7a**)
- A People without a Future in God (**5:7b**)

1. (:5) Impact of Pride

*"Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him,
And Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity;
Judah also has stumbled with them."*

Gary Smith: **Pride** can lead to a hardened rebellion that refuses to change because it means an admission of guilt. Apparently all the people can talk about are their famous forefathers, the past wars they won, the glories of their cities, and all the good things of life. They are blind to the depravity of their present situation and do not want to face reality. They do not want to admit they have made mistakes or that the nation is in trouble. This pride is found in both Israel and Judah, and it will lead to their downfall.

Biblehub.com: **Israel's arrogance testifies against them** --The phrase highlights the pride and self-reliance of Israel, which is a recurring theme in the prophetic books. **Arrogance** here refers to Israel's refusal to acknowledge their dependence on God, choosing instead to trust in their own strength and alliances with foreign nations. This pride is seen as a witness against them, as it leads to their downfall. In biblical context, pride is often condemned (**Proverbs 16:18**), and Israel's arrogance is contrasted with the humility God desires (**Micah 6:8**). The testimony against them is not just from God but from their own actions, which reveal their unfaithfulness.

David Allen Hubbard: The beginning charge (the **pride** of Israel, **v. 5**) is self-reliance, failure to depend on God utterly. The concluding charge (**v. 7**) sums up their **spiritual treason** (cf. **6:7**), evidenced in the alien children, religiously and literally bastards, produced by the illicit unions that Hosea flailed in **4:13–14**. In between, the focus is on the **futility of the cult** and its myriads of sacrifices which are symbolized in the two words *flocks* (i.e. small cattle like sheep and goats) and *herds* (i.e. large cattle like cows and oxen). **Judgment by frustration** is what was prescribed for Gomer/Israel in **2:7**, and here it does not produce a penitent return. The frustration turns calamitous in the closing clause (**v. 7c**), when God will devastate *their fields* (which should be read as sole object of the verb) and thus put the Baals to shame in their impotence and strip Israel of the crops that clothed and fed her (cf. **2:9, 12**).

Jason Van Bommel: Israel was not just idolatrous, but they were proud of their idolatry. They had glorious high places at Mizpah and Tabor. These places were abominations to God, scenes of spiritual adultery by God's beloved people, but the real problem was Israel's pride in these places. Far from being ashamed of their sin, they promoted it and profited from it. They were proud.

2. (:6) Impotency of Religious Ritual -- Impossibility of Recovery
*"They will go with their flocks and herds To seek the LORD,
but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them."*

Biblehub.com: **They go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD** -- In ancient Israel, sacrifices were a central part of worship, and flocks and herds were often used as offerings to God. This phrase indicates that the people are attempting to seek God through ritualistic means, bringing their animals as sacrifices. However, their actions are superficial, lacking genuine repentance or heartfelt devotion. This reflects a broader theme in the Old Testament where God desires obedience and a contrite heart over mere ritual (**1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 51:16-17**). The Israelites' reliance on external rituals

without true faith mirrors the practices condemned by prophets like Isaiah (**Isaiah 1:11-15**).

Robin Routledge: Generally, seeking '*the Lord*' is something positive (e.g. **Deut. 4:29; Zeph. 2:3; Zech. 8:20–23**) and may indicate repentance (cf. **3:5; 5:15; Isa. 55:6–7; Jer. 50:4**). Here, though, it appears to suggest **reliance on ritual** which, without a right attitude, proves fruitless. It may also reflect arrogance in taking Yahweh for granted and supposing that he will be available when they choose to seek him (**Glenny 2013: 104**). But though they seek him, they will not find him, because Yahweh has withdrawn himself from them (cf. **5:15**).

H. D. Beeby: Why has God withdrawn? It was not caprice or spite, or loss of love or interest. It was the inevitable act of God. It was the withdrawal demanded by love. The love that had chosen freely and given freedom to the chosen one could never do less than honor that freedom. Israel the partner in covenant had broken the covenant; Israel the wife had been unfaithful (**v. 7a, b**); Israel the known was unknowing. It was Israel who had first withdrawn from God, and God's withdrawing was the inevitable response. God's absence was a deprivation and a punishment; it was both educational and designed to bring a change in Israel's attitude. Yet these are still not the profoundest reasons for God's locked door. They do not justify the word "inevitable"; rather, they are secondary to something far more fundamental. The true cause of God's absence was that love cannot coerce, and God loved Israel. Creators can coerce, partners can enforce, kings can command and educationalists overrule, but lovers knock on locked doors and then go away (**Cant. 5:2ff.**). It is the seducer or rapist who stays. A withdrawn Israel, in the nature of things, learns of a withdrawn God, but God's withdrawing is not primarily vengeful nor a simple tit for tat. It is the work of suffering love.

3. (:7) Inversion of Expectation

*"They have dealt treacherously against the LORD,
For they have borne illegitimate children.
Now the new moon will devour them with their land."*

Biblehub.com: for they have borne illegitimate children -- The "*illegitimate children*" symbolize the fruit of Israel's idolatry. In a literal sense, this could refer to children born from unions with pagan nations, but metaphorically, it represents the spiritual offspring of their unfaithfulness—corrupt practices and beliefs. This imagery is consistent with Hosea's earlier use of family metaphors, such as Gomer's unfaithfulness and the names of Hosea's children (**Hosea 1:2-9**). The concept of illegitimacy underscores the impurity and unacceptability of their actions before God.

The **New Moon** was a time of celebration and worship in Israel (**Numbers 10:10, 28:11-15**). However, here it is turned into a time of judgment. The phrase suggests that what was meant to be a time of renewal and blessing will instead bring destruction. This **inversion of expectation** serves as a warning of impending judgment due to their unfaithfulness. The "*devour*" imagery indicates total consumption, leaving nothing

behind, which aligns with the prophetic warnings of exile and devastation (**Amos 8:5-10**). The mention of "*their land*" emphasizes the comprehensive nature of the judgment, affecting both the people and the land they inhabit, fulfilling the covenant curses outlined in **Deuteronomy 28**.

Robin Routledge: This may refer to children born as a result of the promiscuity associated with the cult. The primary reference, though, as with the equivalent expression '*children of whoredom*' (**1:2**, nrsv), appears to be to a generation which, because of the failure of its spiritual leaders, is also unfaithful to Yahweh (**Glenny 2013: 105**). The consequence of this endemic infidelity is the devouring of Israel's fields (cf. **2:9, 12**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The **blindness of Israel** is reflected in its **arrogance**, which causes it—and Judah—to "*stumble*" (cf. **4:5; 14:1, 9**) in its sin and precipitates its downfall (**v.5**). Though the nation might believe that pilgrimages to the holy sites will gain favor before Yahweh and exhibit their faithfulness, in actuality they have betrayed him (**v.7**). Their improper celebrations (such as the New Moon festivals; cf. **2:13**) are the reason for their judgment.

II. (:8-14) JUDGMENT IS INEVITABLE BECAUSE OF GOD'S HOLY WRATH

Robin Routledge: A key theme in these verses is the judgment on both nations because of their hostility to one another. The conflict between Israel and Judah, in both the Syro-Ephraimite war and numerous border incidents over a long period, threatens the unity of the people. Yahweh's desire is for one people that can stand as a witness to the nations, but that is undermined by continuing rivalry and infighting.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The judgment of God on both Ephraim and Judah begins with a border war between the two nations, continues with an appeal for help from Assyria, and culminates with the fall of Ephraim to the dangerous ally. We see Yahweh as the Lord of all nations. Even though they did not recognize Him, He worked out measures of His judgment through their battles with each other. Eventually their self-seeking alliances backfired. The reality of divine justice is executed through the realities of military and political conflict between the nations.

James Mays: Now suddenly the focus shifts to the political scene with both Israel and Judah on the stage. It is now generally recognized that the events referred to in **5.8–14** belong to the history of **Syrian-Ephraimite war**. It was throughout a venture of tragic folly with grievous consequences for the brother nations of Judah and Israel. In immediate danger of invasion by the Assyrian, Tiglath-pileser, Israel's king Pekah (737–732) joined forces with Rezin of Aram to face their common foe. These two allies were unsuccessful in persuading King Ahaz of Judah to join their coalition. Anxious for Judean assistance and fearful of an unaligned power on their southern borders, the two kings attacked Judah and invested Jerusalem. Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-pileser whose

approach brought an end to the attack on Judah. In 733 Israel was overwhelmed, a large segment of the population was deported, and all her territory except for the central hill country of Ephraim and Benjamin was incorporated into the Assyrian provincial system. Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea (732–724) who assumed the throne of Israel and became a vassal of Tiglath-pileser to save what was left of the nation. The references to contemporary events in **5.8 – 6.6** fit the situation in Israel during the time after the Assyrian attack had begun, just before and after 733. The sayings are addressed to both the northern and southern kingdoms, with the former called Ephraim throughout.

Allen Guenther: The scene now shifts to God as the Lord of history. Three historical judgments are identified.

- The first is set within the covenant community.
- The second depicts the covenant people and the nation in which they have come to trust for their deliverance. The Lord will expose the futility of all other saviors.
- The third pictures God carrying his people off into exile.

A. (:8-9) Call to Arms – Alerting to Serious Threat

*“Blow the horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah.
Sound an alarm at Beth-aven: ‘Behind you, Benjamin!’
Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke;
Among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.”*

Biblehub.com: Blow the ram’s horn in Gibeah -- The blowing of the ram's horn, or shofar, was a call to alert and assemble the people, often used in times of war or significant religious events. Gibeah, a city in the territory of Benjamin, holds historical significance as the location of King Saul's residence (**1 Samuel 10:26**). The call to blow the horn here signifies an urgent warning, possibly of impending judgment or invasion, reflecting the broader theme of Hosea's prophecy against Israel's unfaithfulness.

the trumpet in Ramah -- Ramah, another city in Benjamin, was a strategic location often associated with significant biblical events, such as the burial place of Rachel (**Jeremiah 31:15**). The use of the trumpet, a different instrument from the shofar, emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. This dual sounding of instruments in two key locations underscores the widespread nature of the threat and the need for immediate attention and action.

raise the battle cry in Beth-aven -- Beth-aven, meaning "*house of wickedness*," is a derogatory name for Bethel, a center of idolatrous worship in the Northern Kingdom (**Hosea 4:15**). The call to raise a battle cry here highlights the spiritual corruption and impending divine judgment. This location, once a place of worship, had become synonymous with Israel's apostasy, drawing a parallel to the spiritual battle against idolatry.

Lead on, O Benjamin! -- Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel, is called to lead, possibly due to its geographical proximity to the conflict or its historical role in Israel's military endeavors (**Judges 20:14-16**). This call to action may also symbolize a broader call to repentance and leadership in returning to covenant faithfulness. The tribe's involvement in this prophetic message serves as a reminder of the collective responsibility of all Israel in the face of divine judgment.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This section begins with a **trumpet blast** to prepare for war. The scene is of a watchman on a tower alerting his people of an approaching army (e.g., **Jdg 3:27; 1Sa 13:3; Eze 33:3-6; Am 2:2**). The three places—Gibeah, Ramah, and Bethel (for Beth-Aven as Bethel, see comment on **4:15**)—were located within the territory of Benjamin, for many years a disputed border area between the northern and southern kingdoms. Some commentators believe that there is a directional progression in the geographical locations of these towns that suggests a line of attack, coming from Judah. Such a raid may have taken place as a counteroffensive soon after the Syro-Ephraimite War in order to take advantage of Israel's vulnerability. If such were the case, Judah would be trying to take advantage of Israel's subjugation to the Assyrians as a vassal to the empire. While this scenario is a possibility, no record exists of such a foray. In addition, it is difficult to know whether this shout to arms is defensive and geared to rally these towns to brace themselves for an attack or, alternatively, is designed to encourage troops to press forward.

Trent Butler: **The call to arms is doomed to failure.** God has decreed punishment for the Northern Kingdom. The punishment will come on God's day of reckoning or day of punishment and rebuke. Before anyone can protest, God underlines the finality of the sentence. It will not be commuted. God has made known to the tribes of Israel what is trustworthy and certain.

B. (:10) Corruption Leads to Outpoured Divine Wrath

*"The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary;
On them I will pour out My wrath like water."*

Biblehub.com: **like those who move boundary stones** -- Moving boundary stones was a serious offense in ancient Israel, as these stones marked property lines and were essential for maintaining order and fairness in land ownership. **Deuteronomy 19:14** and **Proverbs 22:28** emphasize the importance of respecting these boundaries. This metaphor suggests that the leaders of Judah were guilty of corruption and injustice, akin to stealing land and violating the rights of others. It reflects a broader theme of moral decay and disregard for God's laws.

I will pour out My fury upon them like water -- The imagery of pouring out fury like water conveys the idea of an overwhelming and unstoppable judgment. Water, when unleashed, can be both destructive and cleansing, symbolizing God's righteous anger and the inevitable consequences of sin. This phrase underscores the certainty and intensity of divine retribution. Similar expressions of God's wrath can be found in other

prophetic books, such as **Isaiah 5:24-25** and **Jeremiah 7:20**, where God's judgment is depicted as a consuming force.

Derek Kidner: Of the two threats to a people, aggression and corruption, the second is the more ominous, and in these chapters its signs are everywhere. Aggression, for all its terrors, can unite and purge, but corruption only divides and demoralizes.

John Goldingay: The action against Judah will involve **fury** like an overwhelming flash flood pouring out (the word for “*fury*” recalls another verb meaning “*overflow*”). Yahweh will personally bring it about. God may use one party within the people of God to bring trouble to another, but the one he uses will then find itself under chastisement even though used by God in this way, if its own aim in the action taken was its own advance. The principle that applies outside the people of God (e.g., to one of the great empires) also applies within it.

C. (:11-14) Crushed by God's Judgment

1. (:11-12) Metaphor of God Destroying His People Like a Moth

*“Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,
Because he was determined to follow man's command.
Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim,
And like rottenness to the house of Judah.”*

Biblehub.com: The phrase “**crushed in judgment**” indicates a severe and decisive punishment from God. This judgment is not arbitrary but a response to the persistent sin and rebellion of the people. The imagery of being “**crushed**” suggests total defeat and humiliation, reflecting the seriousness of their transgressions. This judgment aligns with the covenantal curses outlined in **Deuteronomy 28**, where disobedience leads to destruction and exile.

Biblehub.com: **So I am like a moth to Ephraim** -- In biblical symbolism, a moth represents destruction and decay, often in a slow and subtle manner. Here, God compares Himself to a moth, indicating a gradual but inevitable judgment upon Ephraim, which is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel. This imagery suggests that the consequences of their idolatry and unfaithfulness will eat away at their strength and prosperity. The moth's destructive nature is not immediate but persistent, reflecting how Israel's spiritual decay will lead to its downfall. This metaphor aligns with the broader theme of Hosea, where God warns Israel of the consequences of their covenant unfaithfulness. The use of “*Ephraim*” highlights the leading tribe of the northern kingdom, emphasizing the widespread nature of the sin and its impact.

and like decay to the house of Judah -- The term “*decay*” here is often associated with rot or corrosion, indicating a destructive process that weakens and undermines. By comparing Himself to decay, God warns the southern kingdom of Judah of a similar fate as Ephraim, though the process may differ in form. This serves as a prophetic warning that Judah is not immune to judgment despite its proximity to the temple in Jerusalem and its Davidic lineage. The imagery of decay suggests a deeper, internal

corruption that will lead to Judah's eventual downfall if they do not repent. This phrase connects to the broader biblical narrative where both Israel and Judah face consequences for their disobedience, as seen in the eventual Babylonian exile. The mention of both kingdoms underscores the comprehensive nature of God's judgment and the call for repentance across the entire nation.

Gary Smith: Hosea ends this section with several astonishing metaphors of God's future dealings with both of the guilty parties: Israel and Judah. He makes the shocking claim that God, their loving covenant partner, will be like "*pus*" in an open wound (NIV's "*moth*") and a "*rot*" to these people (5:12). These daring comparisons suggest that Israel and Judah will be like an injured soldier whose wounds are festering with terrible infection. Instead of cleaning, caring for, or healing these wounds of war so that his people can get better, God will be infecting them with more misery. Hosea is jarring his audience awake by showing that **God will fight against them** rather than for them if they continue with these war plans.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: These **diverse metaphors** underscore the difference between the absolute sovereignty of God over against his people's failings and fate. The weight of this disparity is felt not only by the presence of the personal pronoun with the finite verb in v.14b, something not necessary in Hebrew, but also by its repetition (lit., "*I, even I, will tear*"). Another contrast is drawn between Yahweh and the most powerful human ruler at that time, the "*great king*," the king of Assyria. (In 2Ki 18:19 [par. Isa 36:13] he is called the "*great king*" [*hammelek haggādōl*], but that construction is not the same as the one here.) Though mighty, he cannot cure his vassals' wounds, which Yahweh has inflicted (v.13).

Trent Butler: Looking back on the Syro-Ephraimitic conflict between Israel and Judah, God condemned both parties—Judah for taking northern territory and Israel for false political alliances and false worship. Thus God became the enemy of both the northern and southern nations. He was like an '*ash*' to Ephraim. The term can refer to any decaying material and may intend to point to the decay in the human body represented by pus oozing from an infection. God will be like *raqab* to the people of Judah. This is another term for something rotten or decaying.

The references to sickness and sores in the following verse may point in the direction of infection or a red, rotten-looking wound in a person's body. God is no longer the faithful keeper of the covenant protecting his people. He is the agent of rot and ruin, infecting his people with sickness and horrible wounds.

2. (:13) Futility of Seeking Deliverance from Assyria

*"When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah his wound,
Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb.
But he is unable to heal you, Or to cure you of your wound."*

Biblehub.com: **But he cannot cure you or heal your wound** -- The prophet Hosea emphasizes the futility of seeking salvation from human powers. Despite Assyria's

might, it cannot provide the spiritual healing that Israel and Judah need. This statement underscores the biblical theme that true healing and restoration come only from God (**Jeremiah 17:5-6**). It serves as a prophetic warning that reliance on worldly powers leads to disappointment and further judgment, as seen in the eventual Assyrian conquest of Israel (**2 Kings 17:6**). This also foreshadows the ultimate healing and redemption found in Jesus Christ, who is the true source of spiritual restoration (**Isaiah 53:5**).

Gary Smith: Rather than depending on the unseen powerful God of heaven and earth, who controls all the military forces on the earth (**Dan. 2:21; 4:17, 34-35**), God's people have all too often turned to man-made powerless gods and human armies for their security. They failed to realize that their military problems were caused by their own sinfulness and that God would heal their land and protect them from foreign dangers if they humbled themselves, confessed their sins, and turned from their evil ways (**2 Chron. 7:14**). The crossing of the Red Sea (**Ex. 15**), Gideon's defeat of the Midianites with three hundred men (**Judg. 7**), and David's defeat of Goliath (**1 Sam. 17**) all demonstrate that battles are won by the Lord, not by the military strength of a nation's army.

3. (:14) Metaphor of God Tearing Apart His People Like a Lion

*“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away,
I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver.”*

Biblehub.com: **For I am like a lion to Ephraim** -- In this phrase, God compares Himself to a lion, a symbol of strength and ferocity. Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel, is warned of impending judgment. The lion imagery signifies God's power and the inevitability of His judgment. In biblical context, lions are often used to depict God's might and authority (**Amos 3:8**). The northern kingdom's idolatry and alliances with foreign nations led to their downfall, as prophesied by Hosea.

and like a young lion to the house of Judah -- Here, the focus shifts to Judah, the southern kingdom. The "*young lion*" suggests a more immediate and vigorous threat. While Judah had periods of faithfulness, they too fell into sin. This warning serves as a reminder of God's impartiality in judgment. The lion imagery is consistent with other prophetic warnings (**Jeremiah 25:38**), emphasizing the seriousness of their spiritual state.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Judah also will experience this tearing to pieces, but perhaps in a more gentle manner (see **2 Kings 18:13-16; 19:1-7**), because "*a young lion*" (Hebrew, *kephir*) is known more for his roar than for his savagery (**Job 4:10; Psalm 104:21; Isa. 31:4; Zech. 11:3**).

Trent Butler: God had a strategy against his people. He would become a ravaging, hungry lion on the prowl. He would attack Ephraim and Judah, tearing their carcasses to pieces, satisfying his own hunger to punish these rebellious peoples. He would leave

pieces of the carcass in the field for vultures and other scavengers to eat. He would then carry the carcasses away and hide them where no one could find them or rescue them. This is a veiled reference to exile for the two nations.

H. D. Beeby: The loving, redeeming God is now likened to lions at their fiercest—when they are young and hungry. It is God and none other who kills and rends, apparently without compunction or compassion, because after the slaughter he leaves the bloody scene, presumably to digest at leisure. The lion simile is appropriate to describe how Assyria walked the imperial path, but it is surely an astounding way to speak of the God who in **ch. 11** speaks of Israel as his son. Ours not to reason why, or to explain. It is the Scriptures (in their entirety) which witness to our justification. We cannot and should not attempt to justify the source of all that enables us to be justified. We shall be content to remark on a paradox so often found in both Old and New Testaments, namely, that it is often those who most stress one pole of God's activity who are most likely to be aware of and underline the other pole. It is done with no sense of contradiction, and even the tension is rarely discussed. The gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who nevertheless can speak of the agonies of hell as no other does, is prefigured in the words of many of his forerunners. It is almost as though the goodness of God cannot be seen without his severity, as though he cannot be known as savior unless he has been feared as enemy. Hosea is one of many who prepared us for the day when God's own Son cried "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*" before he was able confidently to commit his soul into his Father's hands.

(:15) TRANSITION – ONLY REMEDY IS REPENTANCE AND SEEKING GOD

*"I will go away and return to My place
Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."*

James Mays: Verse 15 stands apart from vv. 10–14 and 6.1–3; it does not continue directly the foregoing description of Yahweh's punishment nor does it belong to the following song. Yahweh's action is no longer the visitation of his wrath to destroy, but a strategy to bring his people back to him. Yet v. 15 is an **indispensable transition**. It prepares for the song of penitence by portraying Yahweh as the God who waits for the response of his people. And the song is clearly composed as a response to the judgment described in vv. 10–14 (see the comment on 6.1–3). What the announcement of Yahweh's withdrawal does in effect is to interpret Yahweh's wrath in such a way that the experience of punishment becomes an invitation to penitence. It introduces a constant theme of Hosea that God in his anger against his people's sin ultimately seeks their **reconciliation**.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The image of the lion extends through the final two verses of the chapter. This text makes the important point that the goal of divine judgment is to effect a profound change in the heart of God's people. What Yahweh desires is that they come to him and admit their sin and guilt, so that their seeking might be genuine (cf. 3:5;

contrast 5:6). Tragically, it will be out of their suffering that they will come to him earnestly.

H. D. Beeby: The final verse (5:15) is a comment on the awful news preceding it and a preparation for what is to follow in **ch. 6**. God's "going away" and "carrying off" are shown not to be the whole story. They are scenes in a drama which need the later acts for clarification. The "going away" is real, but it is only disciplinary; it is **chastisement** with a saving purpose. In the same way, just as God goes away only because the people had gone from him, so his return is dependent on their turning once more to him. The brutality received at the hands of Judah or Assyria is a "godly" brutality; it is designed to bring confession of guilt, a change of heart, and a renewal of the covenant as the lost sheep return to the fold.

Biblehub.com: **they will earnestly seek Me** -- The earnest seeking of God implies a sincere and wholehearted pursuit, often born out of desperation and need. This reflects a transformation from superficial religiosity to genuine devotion. The prophetic literature frequently calls for such earnestness, as seen in **Jeremiah 29:13**, where God promises to be found by those who seek Him with all their heart. This seeking is a precursor to restoration and renewal, pointing to the hope of redemption through repentance.

Duane Garrett: Continuing the metaphor of the lion, Yahweh declares that he will turn back and go to his "place," that is, his "lair." After Yahweh has destroyed the nations, he will await Israel's repentance. This, of course, turns the metaphor of the lion in an unnatural direction; a lion, after it has devoured its prey, cannot return to its den and offer a new chance at life to its prey. Hosea, however, is not bound by convention. More than that, in the language of Hosea, "Israel" and "Judah" refer more to the political and religious institutions of those nations than to the people. With the corrupt governments and priesthods overthrown, a possibility of return now presents itself. It is noteworthy that in this verse he has abandoned the motif of Ephraim and Judah as collective entities. After the conquest these will no longer exist. When the verse says: "*until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me*" (emphasis added), the plural verbs do not refer to institutional Ephraim and Judah but to the people of these former states. **After the conquests the distinction between the two kingdoms will have no significance.** Once again it will simply be the children of Israel who return to God. Put another way, killing Israel is the means of offering salvation to the Israelites.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How are God's people impacted by corrupt and unfaithful leaders?
- 2) What makes religious rituals ineffectual?
- 3) What causes God to withdraw from His people?

4) When God turns against His people and proves to be a destructive force (cf. metaphors of moth and lion), what remedy remains?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: GOD'S PEOPLE CAN GET INTO SUCH DEEP SIN THAT THEY NO LONGER WILL RECOGNIZE AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR SIN AND RETURN TO GOD EVEN AFTER GOD ALLOWS THEM TO KEEP LOSING ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET THEM TO RETURN TO HIM.

PART #1 – The leaders are responsible for God's people plunging deep into sin. **5:1-7**

This book of Hosea clearly teaches that God will hold political and religious leadership highly accountable and responsible so it had better be pointing people in the true, pure ways of God. Leaders can be a blessing to people or they can be a snare to people.

PART #2 – God warns His own people what He will do to them because they have plunged deep into sin. **5:8-11**

Listen, when God's people drift away from God, God can and will cause every area of life to fall apart. God can cause His own people to collapse mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. When God decides to send His chastising judgment against His own people because they refuse to face their sin, their entire world will fall apart.

PART #3 – God warns what His relationship will be like with His people because they are in sin. **5:12-15**

Metaphor #1 - He would be to His own people like a moth . **5:12-13**

Metaphor #2 - He would be to His own people like a lion . **5:14**

Jeremy Thomas: In **Hos 5:1-7** we saw the tremendous depths of depravity the northern kingdom had fallen into. They were not dealing with one or two sins, they were dealing with a whole passel of sins. They had violated hundreds of very specific laws God had given them and for more details of this you can read **2 Kings 17**. In fact, I encourage you to read that chapter as reinforcement of what we've been covering in **Hos 4-5**. Now, of the laws they had violated they had first violated laws governing their vertical relationship with God, that is the theological sin that the nation was involved in. Always the theological sin is what gets going first and if you observe the Ten Commandments you will see that the first three commandments govern the vertical, the theological and the last seven commandments govern the horizontal, the social. And this structure of the Ten Commandments, the very order of the commandments is teaching us something. And the thing it is teaching us is that the root problems, the deep, deep problem in humanity is not the social sins that disturb people; the abortion, the murder, the

homosexuality and so forth. While those things are problems, they are not the root of the problem; they are the fruits of a much deeper problem. And the much deeper problem is the theological sin that people are committing in the mentality of their soul and this eventually breaks out in the social chaos that we observe in society. But the origin of it all is theological rebellion against the Creator God and then it cascades down through the six stages we've repeated over and over. And by this point in the northern kingdom's history they had passed through all six stages, they were in the last stage which is when God says, I've had it, I withdraw My protection, **I turn you over to destruction.** . .

They turn to King Jareb, literally, the word *yareb* means "*great king*," it's not necessarily a man's name, this was probably a little nickname the Ephraimites had for the Assyrian King at the time, Tiglath-Pileser III. They call him, quote, "*great king*," so you can see how they elevated him; he's the big guy on the block, therefore we'll turn to him for help, and so they try to make an international treaty with Assyria. Maybe Assyria can give us security.

This is another characteristic of how we respond in **deep carnality**. When we have failed to take in the content of the word of God and we've decayed into deep, deep carnality, life keeps going and then somewhere along the way we get in a jam and then we can't trust the Lord. We can't trust that the Lord provides all our needs; we can't appropriate the promise to cast our cares upon Him for He cares for us, and we can't believe that God works all things together for good. And since we can't believe there's only one thing left to do and that is to **resort to a human gimmick**. It's always this way and the pet gimmick of all the OT kings that couldn't believe God's word was to **make international treaties**. We'll get protection from a Gentile kingdom. Now you want to talk about apostasy. Never do you ever see a great saint of Scripture depending on or receiving from the world system, never. You see the world system offer supplies, help, offers to solve the believer's problems but the great believers always insist, absolutely insist, I will receive no such help from the world. Why? What's the principle they're trying to illustrate? That **the Lord supplies all my needs**. They all recognized that to depend upon the world was to abandon the Lord. . . And so another mark of a believer in deep carnality is that he actually turns to the world to get supplies, he tries to prop himself up with the world. It's a mark of apostasy. And both the northern and southern kingdom at various times turned to the king of Assyria for help. It's a sign of deep apostasy when a believer or a church or Christian organization can't trust the Lord. You will always see them go on a gimmick campaign to raise money, something that solicits and violates the grace principle. And strikingly, what does the end of the verse say? They're going to go to the great king of Assyria to get propped up and what does the verse say? It's not going to work. **Gimmicks don't work**. That's why they're called gimmicks. . .

Vs. 15 -- So this is the **theology of abandonment**. Now the abandonment will continue until the nation Israel does two things. We know its going to be a long time before they do these two things and we know they haven't done them yet; we know these two things are still in the future which makes them the subject of prophecy. **Verse 15**

stretches all the way to the Millennium. It starts when the northern kingdom went into Exile in 721BC to Assyria and the southern kingdom went into Exile to Babylon in 586BC. It ends at the Millennium. Now the key date is 586BC - this is when God finally abandoned them and what it's describing is the **departure of the Shekinah Glory**, the departure we studied last Sunday in **Ezek 8 and 10**. The particular route that Shekinah took in 586BC where he went east, west to the midst of the city and then east to the Mt of Olives is the same exact route Christ took in the NT, a deliberate parallel. And **verse 15** is describing that departure I will go away and return to My place, so that covers the whole period from the Exile of 586BC until the restoration in the future Millennium. Now this period is characterized by Gentile imperialism. The Gentile kingdoms are given, during this time period, the right to rule the world which is why Jesus called this period **the times of the Gentiles**. In **Dan 2** and **Dan 7** describes four successive Gentile kingdoms that will rule this period.

Now at the close of this period of Gentile dominion the nation of Israel will do two things according to the verse. The first thing is they must **acknowledge their guilt**. What guilt? The guilt is that which arises due to a specific sin they've committed. It's the rejection of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus. He came to them, He offered Himself to them and they rejected Him. And so the first thing the nation Israel must do is they must acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. They rejected Him but eventually they must acknowledge Him. **Zech 12** and other passages prophesy that they will do this. We don't mean individual Jews admitting this; individual Jews have always been admitting this. What we mean is national Israel admitting this, the whole nation will recognize that Jesus is their Messiah and they will admit their guilt of rejecting Him.

Now, the second thing is the nation, as a whole, **must seek God's face**. What's this seeking of the face? It means they're seeking God's presence, they want Shekinah back in their presence; that's what it means to seek the visible face or presence of God, and Shekinah's return is described in **Ezekiel 40-46**. The Scriptures sketch that Shekinah will return. He departed in 586BC and His presence will return only after they acknowledge their guilt of rejecting their Messiah and want Him to return.

Jason Van Bommel: Have you ever seen someone you love trapped in a downward spiral of self-destruction? If you have, you know it's one of most frustrating and difficult things to watch. This is the situation the Lord is in here in Hosea. He is watching His beloved Israel spiral out of control. We need to pay close attention to the pattern of Israel's sin spiral, because the same pattern can begin to manifest itself in our lives, if we're not diligent.

So, **what does a sin spiral like Israel's look like?** Israel is "*determined to go after filth*." That is, Israel is determined to believe the lying promises of their idols and do what they know is wrong and unfaithful because they think it will pay off in the end. We are "*determined to go after filth*" whenever we willfully choose sin, which is always unfaithfulness to God.

In His love, when God sees His people "*determined to go after filth*," He responds with **discipline**. For Israel, God allowed them to be "crushed in judgment," breaking them so that they might turn to Him. Very often in our lives, God allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin, so we will see the emptiness of the promises of our idols. In a similar way, this is what God does to Israel. Their idols promised them prosperity and fertility, so God makes sure they suffer sickness and loss instead. They need to see how wrong they are to trust in idols.

Sadly, they don't see it. And so, the sin spiral deepens. Instead of seeking the Lord in humility, Israel seeks a worldly solution to their problems: Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.

How often do we suffer consequences for our sin and turn to worldly solutions instead of to the Lord? It's exactly the wrong thing to do, and yet we do it again and again, don't we?

Robert Rayburn: The Point of No Return Where Repentance Seems No Longer Possible

1. It is always a theoretical possibility that one might believe and repent on one's deathbed and be saved. But, in fact, this almost never happens. It is very rare that older people are won to Christ under any circumstances, much less in the pain and confusion and self-preoccupation of one's deathbed.

2. **Augustine** said that there is one case of deathbed repentance recorded in Scripture—the thief on the cross in Luke—that no one may despair it is never too late—but only one that no one should presume. And it is worth pointing out that we do not know the spiritual background of that thief; whether he was a man who all his life had known the Word of God and had often been summoned to believe in God and keep his commandments. Perhaps, but I suspect it is more likely, that he was an irreligious man who knew very little of God and of God's salvation until he saw it in Jesus' face and heard it in his words as our Savior hung on the cross.

3. The puritan **Thomas Brooks** put it this way: Though true repentance be never too late; late repentance is seldom true.'

4. The fact is, however possible in theory it may be for practiced unbelievers to repent late in their lives, repentance is God's gift and God, ordinarily, does not give it to those who have spent their lives spurning his offers of mercy and especially not to those who have lived in the church but time after time have not believed in Christ or repented of sin when summoned and invited to do so.

Is this not precisely the warning Hosea gives us in the text we have read? Who can help those calling for salvation now that the judgment has begun to fall? Only the Lord God can help; but there is the misery; he will not. Time was when he would but they would not; now they would, but he will not.

Now, I want simply to apply this solemn fact—that there is in the spiritual world and life a point of no return—to you, and that in four particulars.

I. First, in view of this truth, surely it is a grave error not to fear sin and its grip upon our lives.

II. Second, in view of the truth that it is possible to pass the point of no return, it is surely important and wise for us to make a practice of nipping sin in the bud in our lives; of giving sin no quarter and no entrance into our hearts.

III. Then, in the third place, this fact, that it is possible in the spiritual world to pass the point of no return, ought to keep us from ever taking our salvation for granted—and rather keep us always protecting, always building, always cultivating the salvation which God has begun in us.

IV. Finally, this fact that there is such a point of no return in the spiritual life ought to make some of you to stop right now with your procrastination.

TEXT: Hosea 6:1-3

TITLE: CALL TO RETURN TO THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

THE PATH TO RESTORATION INVOLVES REPENTANCE AND RENEWAL

INTRODUCTION:

Derek Kidner: There are at least two ways of taking this. One is that God is first portraying in **5:15 – 6:3** the deep conversion that He is working for and will at last evoke – that total change of heart which will irradiate the closing chapter of the book. Then in **verses 4ff.** He turns to the sad spectacle of Israel as she is at present, incapable of any such response. On this view (or on the view that **verses 1-3** are Hosea's own plea to Israel – see below) no fault can be found with the sentiments of these verses. In themselves they are a perfect expression of humility, faith and serious intent. The trouble is that Israel is at present in no state to speak or even think along such lines. Religion, for her, is not knowing God, still less 'pressing on to know him'. It is merely placating Him with sacrifice, as **verse 6** implies.

A more common view is that the fine words of **verses 1-3** are Israel's own, but facile and presumptuous, as if to say with Catherine the Great, 'Le bon Dieu pardonnera; c'est son métier' – The good Lord will pardon; that's his trade' – making light of both the desperate state of the nation ('*after two days he will revive us*') and the high demands of pressing on to know the Lord. Against this one might point out that this speech is introduced in **5:15** as something spoken out of deep distress, and that the second word for 'seek' in that verse is especially urgent ('*seek earnestly*': cf. NEB, NIV). Yet a similar passage in the Psalms reveals how false such earnestness can be:

*When he slew them, they sought for him;
they repented and sought God earnestly (sic). . . .
But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues.
Their heart was not steadfast toward him
(Ps. 78:34, 36-37).*

Either view, then, is possible, and either way it emerges that Israel has no conception of the faithful love that God is looking for. But to me it is the **former view** that carries conviction, if only because the divine protest in **verse 6** makes no contact – except by way of agreement! – with anything in **verses 1-3**. It also allows us to read these verses as the eloquent and rich example of a serious approach to God which they appear to be. They are restored to us as words not only for study but for actual use.

J. Andrew Dearman: The question is whether **6:1-3** is the speech of the people that the Lord longs to hear while waiting in his place (**5:15**), and is thus composed by Hosea to

represent true repentance (if only Israel would embrace it!); or whether **6:1–3** is something that Israel is proposing but in an inadequate way.

Duane Garrett: Hosea here identifies himself with the people and calls on them to join him in returning to Yahweh. The placement of **6:1–3**, a call to repent, immediately after Yahweh's declaration that he would retire to his place and await a positive response from the people cannot be accidental. Nevertheless, scholars often treat this text as a secondary addition, or at least as a **spurious repentance** on the part of Israel. Some argue that this text is a citation of a liturgy given by the wayward religious leadership, which Hosea or a redactor has inserted in order to illustrate their artificial piety and their arrogant presumption that Yahweh would save them. So interpreted **6:1–3** is ironic; it is not a true call to repentance. The justification for such a reading is that Yahweh's response in **6:4** indicates exasperation with the transitory piety of Israel and Judah. In that response, however, Yahweh specifically chides the people for hollow cultic ceremony and for a want of true repentance (**6:6**). **Verses 1–3**, however, are entirely in keeping with what God desires: the verses recognize that God has punished the people (**v. 1**) and express a desire for them to attain to the knowledge of God. One could only read **6:1–3** as false piety if it expressed the things **6:4ff.** condemns, specifically, **a desire to appease God through ritual**. In fact, the desiderata of **6:1–3** and **6:4–6** are exactly the same. Therefore **6:4** should not be read as a rejection of **6:1–3** but as **despair over whether the people would ever heed the call of 6:1–3**.

Terence Fretheim: The language is exquisite, the religious practice thoughtful, the theology apt, the repentance explicit, the recognition of appropriate divine judgment evident, and the quest for knowledge of the Lord in tune with Hosea's most basic concerns. Moreover, creation is related to God and not Baal, there are no signs of apostate worship, and their hope in God is voiced clearly. Indeed, the people do what **3:5** anticipates they will do.

James Mays: These three verses make up a distinct unit. It has long since been recognized that the piece is liturgical in form and is to be identified as a **song of penitence**. Such songs were used in times of national crisis when the people were assembled for fasting, lament, petition, and sacrifice to avert the wrath of God. The song is composed of two elements: a twofold summons to return to Yahweh and to acknowledge his lordship (**vv. 1a α, 3a α**), followed by assertions of confidence that Yahweh will save.

Jeremy Thomas: Now watch because **Hos 6:1–3** is this principle applied to the nation Israel. The chapter division at this point is unfortunate because this connects directly with **verse 15**. **Verse 15** said that when they sunk to their all time low and they were at the end of their rope they would acknowledge their guilt, they would seek His presence and it would be an earnest search. **Verses 1–3** is the nation doing those three things. When did the nation do this? Answer: they haven't done it yet. So **verses 1–3 describe a future response of the nation Israel to their God**.

Alternate View:

H. D. Beeby: I propose to take the six verses as continuous and, therefore, to accept that the first three express a superficial repentance. . . What we must note is proximity of the passage to the traditional text in vv. 4–6 and the total absence of any historical reference which might incline us to divide the verses into two distinct halves. In fact the evidence is rather against such a division, as there seems to be a correspondence in verse form yet in contrast to their contents. . . the six verses describe Israel’s “return” as a sham, or at least as an inadequate confession; that is why the return is followed by God’s exposure of its hollow triviality and then his giving of his own definition of what is demanded of his people.

Trent Butler: God promised his blessings to a people who returned to him with their whole heart (**Deut. 30:9–10**). Such repentance meant turning to God and away from all idols and false worship (**1 Sam. 7:3**). Repentance was a matter of the heart, not of traditional mourning rituals (**Joel 2:13**). But such repentance seldom happened in Israel's history (**2 Kgs. 23:25**). Hosea pictured a people who went through the proper community worship ritual and said the right words but had the wrong emphasis. . .

Israel makes the pursuit too easy. God's appearance to a people pursuing him is as sure as tomorrow's sunrise or like the rains that come in the rainy seasons of the year to water the crops. God is gracious. God is forgiving. God wants an intimate relationship in which his people truly know him, but God cannot be reduced to a law of nature that always repeats itself no matter what the people do. Repentance and knowledge of God depend on a much deeper understanding and expectation of God.

I. (:1-2) REPENTANCE -- RETURN TO THE LORD WHO HEALS AND GIVES NEW LIFE

A. (:1a) Exhortation – Return to the Lord in Repentance

“Come, let us return to the LORD.”

Duane Garrett: Every time the word “*return*” is used with Israel as the subject and Yahweh as the one to whom return is made, it indicates a **true repentance** and not a pseudoreturn. In fact, returning to Yahweh is a major theme of the book. The structure of this short song develops a basic theme of the Bible, that repentance necessarily precedes reception of divine favor.

Derek Kidner: [The word “*return*”] embraces both repentance and conversion, crowned with reconciliation. The word is as strong as it is simple.

B. (:1b-2) Motivation – The Lord Heals and Resurrects

1. (:1b) The Lord Heals

a. Healing Viewed from the Lion Motif

“For He has torn us, but He will heal us;”

b. Healing Viewed from the Disease Motif

“He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.”

Allen Guenther: Their hope for recovery rests in the Lord. They appeal to no one else. Inasmuch as he has punished, in his time he will also restore their fortunes and bind up their wounds. God can be trusted to respond to heartfelt sorrow over sin. God’s people have become aware that **he is the only Deliverer**.

Alternate View:

David Allen Hubbard: Song of Feeble Penitence

Yet none of this is enough. The crucial requirement of ‘*admitting their guilt*’ (v. 15) has been omitted. They have faced their woundedness (v. 2; cf. 5:12–13) but not their waywardness. Healing is sought, even resurrection, but no specific sin is mentioned. This absence of repentance and failure to confess sins by name contrast sharply with Hosea’s closing song of penitence (14:1–3). And God’s complaint (vv. 4–5) seems to indicate his **dismissal of the song as inadequate**, whereas Israel’s final song is followed by Yahweh’s promise of love and healing and then by his own love song (14:4–7).

2. (:2) The Lord Resurrects

“He will revive us after two days;

He will raise us up on the third day That we may live before Him.”

Duane Garrett: It is clear that in its original context this passage describes the restoration of Israel, the people of God; and for many interpreters this is proof enough that the resurrection of Christ is not in view here. Such interpretation, however, understands messianic prophecy too narrowly as simple, direct predictions by the prophets of what the Messiah would do. In fact, the prophets almost never prophesied in that manner. Instead, **they couched prophecy in typological patterns** in which the works of God proceed along identifiable themes. Furthermore, Christ in his life and ministry embodied Israel or recapitulated the sojourn of Israel. Thus, for example, Christ’s forty days in the wilderness paralleled Israel’s forty years of wandering, and his giving of his Torah on a mountain (**Matt 5–7**) paralleled the Sinai experience.

Another great event in Israel’s history was its restoration after captivity, an event that was almost a bringing of the nation back from the dead. Ezekiel develops this concept in his dry bones vision (**Ezek 37:1–14**). From this we can conclude that Christ’s resurrection, in addition to its profound soteriological aspects, was **a typological embodiment of the “resurrection” of Israel in its restoration**. We should add that this is not artificially reading New Testament history into the Old Testament (as in allegorization) because it **follows the established pattern of the parallel between the history of Israel and the life of Christ**. Furthermore, as so often happens in texts of this kind, the details of the passage work themselves out in different ways. The “*two days*” are for Israel metaphorical for a relatively short captivity but have a literal fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ. Similarly, the raising to life is literal in the case of Christ, but in the case of Israel it is a metaphor for restoration.

Derek Kidner: Nothing short of **resurrection** is fit to describe such need and such salvation; and while the mention of the third day would sound to Hosea's hearers as the mere equivalent of '*very soon*', the prophet may have spoken more significantly than he knew; for it is only in Christ's resurrection that His people are effectively raised up, as both Paul and Peter teach us. And when Paul finds, apparently, not only the resurrection but even '*the third day*' to be '*in accordance, with the scriptures*' (**1 Cor. 15:4**), it is at least possible – though one should put it no higher – that this passage as well as '*the sign of Jonah*' was in his mind.

Robin Routledge: Links with the New Testament are primarily **typological**, presenting correspondences between the narratives of God's people in the Old Testament and Christ, the ideal Israel (**Garrett** 1997: 159). Such correspondences are generally noted **in retrospect**. The Old Testament sets out patterns of divine activity which are recognized and reapplied by later writers, and that appears to be the significance of '*according to the Scriptures*'. However, in their original context, they are **not predictive**.

Alternate View:

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Another interpretive issue in this pericope is whether **v.2** might be a prediction of or a typological allusion to the resurrection wrought by Jesus the Messiah. Might this be the reference behind the assertion in **1 Corinthians 15:4** that Christ arose on the third day "*according to the Scriptures*" (**Lk 24:7**)?

Three observations are apropos. To begin with, the concept of coming to life as a picture of national renewal appears elsewhere in the OT—importantly within this very book (**13:14**), but most famously in the vision of the dry bones in **Ezekiel 37:1–14** (cf. **Dt 30:17–20**; **Am 5:1–6**). The hope of individual resurrection was not unknown, though existing perhaps in rudimentary form (esp. **Da 12:2**), but this verse is speaking corporately and not of particular pious individuals (cf. **P. S. Johnston**, *Shades of Sheol: Death and the Afterlife in the Old Testament* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002], 221–27). The expectation is for Israel to be made whole again after the attack of the divine lion.

Second, from the available evidence it seems that **6:2** did not become a proof text for resurrection until **Tertullian** (ca. 155–230 AD; cf. **Wolff**, 118).

Third, in the context the numerical sequence itself—"two/three"—is revealing. It is a way of **expressing a short period of time**. The n/n+1 combination (here n = 2) indicates a vague period of time (GKC §134s), while the numbers "two" and "three" themselves signify a short span (e.g., **Isa 7:21**; **17:6**; **2Ki 20:5, 8**). In other words, **this sinful people presume that a favorable verdict from God will come in quick order**—another sign that they appreciate neither the seriousness of their transgressions nor the uselessness of their religious activities. This blind audacity is confirmed in **v.3**. Israel takes for granted that its darkness will turn into light and that divine blessings will come as refreshing rains. Quite a bold denial of the drought foretold in **2:3**! [taking the position that v.1-3 are an inadequate, shallow confession]

II. (:3) RENEWAL -- PURSUE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD BECAUSE WE CAN COUNT ON HIS BLESSING

A. Exhortation – Pursue the Deepening Knowledge of the Lord

“So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.”

B. Motivation – Two Images of Certain Renewal and Blessing

Gary Smith: Hosea motivates any doubters with the promise of the **reliability of God (6:3)**. His appearance is not only 100 percent sure—like the positive experience of sunlight (a contrast to darkness) and rain (a contrast to drought). These comparisons are probably chosen because everyone knows that the sun and rain **can be counted on** and because these physical elements bring new life to dying plants. This hope also contrasts God’s withdrawal from the nation (**5:6, 15**) with his gracious coming (**6:3**).

1. Imagery of the Dawn Bringing Light after Darkness with Regularity and Certainty

“His going forth is as certain as the dawn;”

Duane Garrett: The surface meaning is moderately clear; we can count on Yahweh to come (and save us) just as surely as we can count on the rising of the sun. Through the metaphor, however, Yahweh's advent is portrayed as a time of joy, like the dawn after a dark night. This language is not accidental. Rather, it is a reversal of the punishment in the second oracle, the devouring of the land by the new moon (**5:7**). As described there, the operating metaphor is the darkness that consumes the land during the new moon; dawn is an obvious reversal of the image.

2. Imagery of the Refreshing Spring Rain

*“And He will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth.”*

Duane Garrett: The final reversal is the coming of rain. We have already suggested that the unusual phrase “*the wind shall bind her in her wings,*” in **4:19**, might refer to drought, but in any case **4:3** has already described drought and **2:9** (Hb. **2:11**) describes the effects of drought. Thus the return to Yahweh reverses all the afflictions that had come upon the people. **The terrors of the lion, disease, darkness, and drought disappear in healing, bandaging, dawn, and seasonal rains.**

Jeremy Thomas: Finally, once the nation is restored to true fellowship then she’ll be blessed, then she’ll have her land, then she’ll have her agricultural abundance, then she’ll have economic prosperity, then she’ll have Shekinah’s presence in the Millennial Temple, then she’ll have her Messiah sitting on the throne of David, all the blessings promised to her will be hers.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Who do you think is the speaker in these verses?
- 2) What is the connection between these verses and **5:15**?
- 3) How has the Lord healed the brokenness in your life?
- 4) What is our strategy for pursuing a deeper knowledge of the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: This short passage anticipates the repentance and restoration of a future generation beyond the destructive judgment of the exile. After God has torn and wounded his people, he will heal, bind up, revive and restore his people after they return to him. In a short period of time, God will resurrect his people from the realm of death to live in his presence. This reverses the punishment described at the end of **chapter 5**. With the people's return to the Lord, he will return to them, bringing refreshment (cf. **Zec. 1:3; Mal 3:7**). As Israel's representative, Jesus bore God's judgment on the cross and was raised on the third day so that we can live in the Lord's presence, knowing him and experiencing his many blessings.

S. Lewis Johnson: I think it is better to look at these verses as if the prophet speaks, but he's giving the words that God wants people to say to him, the words that he wishes that this generation of Israel would utter to him. . .

"So let us press on to know the Lord." In the Hebrew text that's a very strong word. It means **to pursue**. Let us press on to know the Lord. In other words, more than national survival, it isn't enough that Israel shall come to the knowledge of the Lord God in one great experience when the nation is converted as in a day. No. There is much more to the life of God than that. . .

It's like **marriage**. In fact, Hosea's whole book is built around the idea that to know God is to enter into a marriage relationship with him. And the relationship between Gomer, Hosea's wife, and Hosea, is designed to picture the relationship between Israel and the Lord God. And all of us who have been married know that when we have entered into marriage, there is a sense in which we really come to know that person. But, ah, the years that follow, **that knowledge increases**, and it should increase. It should grow. It should expand. So that those who've been married a long time, they really know one another.

And when you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, that's the beginning of life. That's the beginning of the knowledge of God. The ultimate aim of man is to know God, for to

know him is to enjoy him, to love him. And also to love him perseveringly, too. So, it's like a marriage. And he says, let's know him; let's press on to know him.

Allen Guenther: **Hosea 4:4 – 6:3** has centered on the theme of “*knowing God*.” We now draw the strands of this theme into a larger whole. The “*knowledge of God*” is pictured in Hosea as information and interpretation, experience, and acknowledgment.

I. Information and Interpretation

The truth of God and the truth about God are part of the same self-disclosure. . . Israel stands accused of blindness which leads to distortion and eventually to the deliberate suppression of the truth. The end result is that sin so obscures the knowledge of the true God that it renders people incapable of recognizing the acts of God and interpreting them as such.

II. Experience

The intimacy of the sex act, the affirmations of love and care which are a natural part of lovemaking, the openness which it promotes – all these are part of the immediacy of knowing God. To know him is not an act of pure reason. It consists of experiencing him in the intimacy of committed love.

III. Acknowledgment

Concretely, such acknowledgment may be expressed by admitting to his presence and being open to hear God speak and then to obey his instruction (**Gen. 22:12; Jer. 24:7**). Sacrifices and worship are ways of acknowledging God (**Isa. 19:21**), as is the act of developing skill in doing good (**Jer. 4:22; 9:3, 6**).

C. H. Spurgeon: On pursuing the knowledge of God –

It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God . . . The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compare and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and we go our way with the thought, “Behold, I am wise.”

But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

TEXT: Hosea 6:4-11a

TITLE: *DIVINE FRUSTRATION OVER LACK OF LOYALTY*

BIG IDEA:

RELIGIOUS RITUALS CANNOT COMPENSATE FOR LACK OF LOYAL LOVE AND TREACHEROUS ACTS OF REBELLION

INTRODUCTION:

John Schultz: Again, God's inner conflict is expressed in the question: "*What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah?*" It is as if God says to His children: "You be the judge. What would you do in my place?" In view of the coming judgment, nothing is spiritually so healthy for us as to look at our lives from God's perspective, supposing that we can do that without bias. The **Adam Clarke's** Commentary observes: "Speaking after the manner of men, the justice and mercy of God seem puzzled how to act toward them. When justice was about to destroy them for their iniquity, it was prevented by their repentance and contrition; when mercy was about to pour upon them as penitents its choicest blessings, it was prevented by their fickleness and relapse! These things induce the just and merciful God to exclaim, 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?' The only thing that could be done in such a case was that which God did." . . .

As in the previous chapter, Judah is included in the text. It is as if God raises a warning finger at the southern kingdom to let them know that what is going to happen in the north will happen to them also if they do not repent.

Richard Patterson: Hosea continues his complaints concerning Israel's infidelity by posing the Lord's rhetorical question concerning His people: just what was the Lord to do with such an inconsistently faithful people as His Israel and Judah? (**6:4**). Indeed, their fidelity to God's person and standards was as fleeting as the quickly disappearing morning mist or dew. As these appear briefly only to vanish with the rising sun, so God's people have shown brief flashes of spiritual progress and then have shortly afterwards resorted to their own selfish ways. Even worse now, they attempt to blend the worship of Yahweh with respect for foreign deities.

The Lord expects no answer to His question, nor is He looking for information from His hearers. The rhetorical question is couched in human phraseology in order to make the Lord's people understand His great concern for them. Much as a parent is so disappointed with his child's conduct that he almost throws up his hands in despair, so a loving God warns His people that His seeming tardiness in withholding their deserved punishment is nearing an end. Through His prophets God has repeatedly warned His people of the dangers of apostasy, compromise, and infidelity. They have often enough conveyed messages of judgment (e.g., **Joel 1**). Hosea has previously represented Israel as a stubborn heifer (**4:16**). Now as an animal destined to be sacrificed is slain and cut into pieces, so the words spoken through the Lord's prophets will surely be fulfilled.

The imagery, though extreme (but cf. **5:14**), is reminiscent of the psalmist's complaint in **Psalm 44:11**, "*You handed us over like sheep to be eaten.*" Yet as **Stuart** points out, "These words reflect the curses of the Mosaic Covenant through catchword connections with **Deut 33** and **32**... . The punishment of being '*killed*' (*grh*) is a covenant judgment (**Amos 4:10; 9:1, 4**), though the notion of killing is expressed via other vocabulary in **Deut 28** and **32**." Indeed, covenant Israel stands in the line of long covenant breakers and thus God's people should expect the penalties associated with covenant violation to be imposed upon them.

I. (:4-6) COVENANT LOYALTY LACKING

A. (:4) Frustration with Transient Loyalty

*"What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
For your loyalty is like a morning cloud,
And like the dew which goes away early."*

Gary Smith: God's response to Hosea's invitation begins with a **lament of disappointment**. It is not that he does not know what to do; it is that he does not really want to do what he has to do. Somewhat like frustrated parents who are at their wits end on how to raise a deviant son, God wonders what he can do to bring about a real change in his people's hearts. The internal struggle suggests that he loves Israel and Judah dearly and does not want to punish them. But when they do not respond appropriately, what can he do? He has warned them, chastened them to wake them up, and promised hope if they repent. **What more can he do?**

God's dissatisfaction with the devotion of his people is based on the **fleeting nature** of their covenant love for him (**6:4b**). Like dew, it disappears as quickly as a vapor. Commitments mean nothing; their consistency never lasts; they are positive one day and negative the next. They say they will seek God and worship him, but soon they are inquiring of Baal and depending on military power instead of on God. They do not seem to know what loyalty means.

Duane Garrett: Here, for the first time, we see clearly the attitude behind the sudden, often inexplicable shifts between harsh, unmerciful judgment and complete pardon in the Book of Hosea: it is the frustration of Yahweh that arises from his unwavering love and from their constant wavering and outright apostasy.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Israel's chronic ailment, disloyalty, was easy to diagnose but so difficult to remedy because of her strong resistance as a patient. A dizzying cyclical pattern of **loyalty – disloyalty – punishment** had become ingrained in Israel's character since the time of the judges (e.g., **Judg. 4:1-24**). Now, however, the malignancy of disloyalty had spread throughout the nation, causing the temporary remedies to become obsolete. Drastic action was a necessity.

As metaphors of Israel's loyalty, the Lord chose the morning cloud and the dew, figures expressing something that has beauty but no substance. The people who have no inner substance need the life of God infused into them.

Robin Routledge: Verse 4 begins with two rhetorical questions indicating Yahweh's frustration with Ephraim and Judah, given all he has done for them. Love here translates *hesed*, which is the proper response of the people to Yahweh, and to one another, on the basis of their covenant relationship. This, though, is as **transient** as morning mist or as dew that evaporates quickly in the heat of the day. This suggests that the people may have made some effort, but it was fleeting and has come to nothing.

John Goldingay: While Yahweh may then be referring to morning mist, his point is stronger if he is speaking of the **morning cloud** in Israel's highlands that can look as if it promises rain but whose appearance is deceptive more often than not. **Dew** plays a key role in the dry summer months in bringing crops to fruition, but it soon disappears, too. Israel's commitment has been similar to both, as its story from the beginning shows.

B. (:5) Faithfulness of God's Judgments via the Prophets

*"Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth."*

Gary Smith: Because God's people do not consistently maintain their covenant relationship with him, he has sent prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and others to declare in no uncertain terms what punishments God will send (6:5). These prophets declared God's intention to slay them for their sins if they did not love God with all their hearts.

David Allen Hubbard: Therefore (v. 5) serves to explain the judgments that have already been inflicted (the first two verbs are past tense) through God's agents, the prophets, who have faithfully and forcefully conveyed the destructive words of Yahweh's mouth. The link between the prophets and their Lord is so intimate that their utterances of judgment constitute the very acts of 'hewing' or 'hacking' and 'slaying' that Israel's sin warranted.

James Mays: In this struggle through the prophets against Israel's empty religiosity, the will of the covenant Lord has been set forth with the clarity of the sun whose rising dispels all darkness. Perhaps the metaphor '*like light*' is again a response to the song and its comparison of Yahweh's coming to help to the certainty of the dawn. Israel clamours for help but ignores the revelation through the prophets. . .

"light that goes forth" -- The clause obviously plays off *his going forth is sure as the dawn* in verse 3. The tone is ironic: in her feeble song of penitence Israel had banked on the dependability of God's healing; 'what is really as **dependable** as daybreak', Yahweh countered, 'is my judgment.'

Allen Guenther: The subject of the concluding clause of **6:5** is **light**, lightning, or illumination. It reads, *Illumination went out in the form of your judgments*. So the judgments throw light on Israel's sin. God first warns of the consequences of disobedience, then he explains the reasons for the judgments. Both types of prophetic messages are common, and both hold lip mirrors whereby the nation may recognize its condition and return to the Lord.

The contrast between the prophetic word and how Israel responds to the judgments (**6:6**) explains Israel's failure to understand their covenant Lord. The prophets have urged Israel toward holy living. The people respond by increasing their sacrifices. The response misses the mark.

Trent Butler: God has used his prophets, like Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, to cut down his people like a stonecutter would cut to pieces a massive rock. The prophetic words that came directly from God's mouth were the divine weapon of execution, killing his people.

J. Andrew Dearman: Just as light pierces the darkness, so divine judgment has come forth in Israel's history.

Biblehub.com: **and My judgments go forth like lightning.**

Lightning is a symbol of suddenness and power, illustrating the swift and unavoidable nature of God's judgments. In the ancient Near East, lightning was often associated with divine presence and action, as seen in the theophany at Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19:16**). This imagery conveys the idea that God's judgments are both inevitable and righteous, striking with precision and authority. The comparison to lightning also emphasizes the clarity and visibility of God's actions, leaving no doubt about His sovereignty and justice. This phrase connects to other scriptural references where God's judgment is depicted as swift and decisive, such as in the prophetic books and Revelation.

C. (:6) Focus on Loyalty Rather than Ritual

*"For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*

Robin Routledge: This does not denigrate sacrifice, and the wider prophetic vision of the future includes animal sacrifices (e.g. **Jer. 33:18; Ezek. 40:38–43; 46; Zech. 14:21; Mal. 1:11**). However, Yahweh does not desire cultic observance which seeks to manipulate rather than respond properly to him, and *hesed* and the knowledge of God emphasize the importance of relationship with him. Sacrifices offered with the right inner attitude remain important, and will do so until Christ's death makes them unnecessary (**Routledge** 2009).

James Mays: The knowledge of God is the unqualified response to Yahweh as he was revealed in the Exodus and wilderness and the obedience which hears and obeys his

instruction. It is, therefore, a knowing which becomes a state of being. Yahweh wants community with Israel through loyalty and love instead of sacrificial meals. He desires the service of faith and obedience, not the adulation of burning altars. In his election of Israel Yahweh had not meant to found one more religion of ritual by which men might manage the divine; he had intended to become absolute Lord of all life. In the eighth century, sacrifice was the essential religious act; Hosea's hearers probably could not conceive of religion apart from sacrifice. The declaration rejecting sacrifice must have sounded radical and nihilistic. But Hosea does not think of the principle as revolutionary. In **I Sam. 15.22** a pronouncement quite similar in form and vocabulary is attributed to Samuel; this prophetic radicalism against the cult also appears in **Amos 5.21 ff.; Isa. 1.12–17; Micah 6.6–8; Pss. 51.16f.; 40.6**. It is characteristic of the form of these declarations that they oppose normative terms understood as covenantal values to acts of sacrifice.

Duane Garrett: This is one of the great texts of the prophets—Jesus used it to expose the hypocrisy of his opponents (**Matt 9:13; 12:7**). Here, again, the two great desiderata of Hosea, love and the knowledge of God, reappear. We should not fail to notice that the polemics against prostitution, violence, and corruption, although not unimportant, are secondary. Hosea is not a religious reactionary who simply desires to stamp out social sins and impose religious duty on people. To the contrary, he desires that his reader acquire the loving and compassionate heart that comes from a transformational life with God. In Hosea's context the shrines and rituals of Israel had become impediments to true spirituality, and Hosea called upon the people to denounce them. This does not mean that Hosea regarded sacrifice or ritual worship as intrinsically bad, and it should not prompt us to suppose that the path to spirituality is to overthrow all liturgy and formal worship. In modern language one might appropriately rephrase this verse as, “I desire devotion and not hymn-singing, service and not sermons,” without thereby concluding that hymns and sermons were evil.

J. Andrew Dearman: It is the lack of love and knowledge of God among the people that is tragic, not the presence of burnt offerings and other sacrifices. Hosea offers here a critique of sacrificial ritual when it is not rooted in a covenantal ethos and where it is seen as a means of inducing a deity to act. In this way of speaking, Hosea joins other prophets and voices that see sacrifice and the public cultus as divinely given gifts to be used with gratitude, not as ritual coercion.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: To believe in and follow Yahweh is to submit to his sovereign will in all of life. Fully acceptable worship values this comprehensive view of God and recognizes that rituals separated from complete obedience are intolerable. If worship does not generate virtuous living and just societal structures, it makes a mockery of Yahweh and is nothing but self-serving piety (also see **Isa 1:10 – 2:5; Jer 7:1–11; Am 5:4–27; Mic 6:1–8**).

II. (:7-11) CATALOG OF NATIONWIDE TREACHERY

J. L. Mays: 6:7-10 is a sort of miniature guidebook to the **geography of sin in Israel**; going from one place to another it catalogues the famous crimes of various localities as an indictment of the whole nation.

David Allen Hubbard: Do they describe three separate crimes, one at each site mentioned (so **Wolff**, pp. 121–122), or a series of episodes in one connected event that touched all three places (so **Andersen**, pp. 435–436)?

H. D. Beeby: Everywhere—Adam, Gilead, Shechem, etc., etc.—the story was the same: transgression, faithlessness, evil, bloodshed, robbery, murder, villainy. And who were largely to blame? The priests who themselves were another gracious gift and who were supposed to be the preservers of the Covenant. God gives; Israel either throws his gift away or turns it into a weapon to be used against God, just as they had done with the gift of sacrifice!

Hosea's hearers would have understood the geographical references. Almost certainly the prophet is reminding them of contemporary events which were of sufficient magnitude or near enough in time to make further elaboration unnecessary. . .

We must read these place names, therefore, without too much regard to their history and even their geography. They are representative of the whole land and of the whole people of Israel. They have become symbols that speak of universal disobedience. In these places and everywhere else, says the prophet, Israel's response to God's desire for love and knowledge (**Hos. 6:6**) has been to do exactly the opposite. It was left to a later Christian writer to coin the phrase "**total depravity**"; these and other verses demonstrate that its content was known only too well to Hosea.

A. (:7-9) Tracking Transgressions in Key Cities

1. (:7) City of Adam

*"But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant;
There they have dealt treacherously against Me."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The context of **verses 8-9**, where towns are mentioned, strongly suggests that **Adam** is the name of a town. Identified in Scripture as the site where the waters of the Jordan divided (**Josh. 3:16**), Adam had fallen like the rest of Israel in transgressing the covenant.

Robin Routledge: If, as seems likely, the **place** is the focus, there may have been a contemporary incident at Adam that we are unaware of. One suggestion is that Adam was linked with the **rebellion of Pekah**, which had the support of men from Gilead (**v. 7**; cf. **2 Kgs 15:25**). On this view, insurrection spread from Adam to Shechem (**v. 9**), and eventually to Samaria, where it resulted in the assassination of Pekahiah (**Macintosh** 1997: 238; **Dearman** 2010: 197–198; see also **J. Day** 1986a: 6).

Sin is described in various ways. **Breaking the covenant (v. 7)** is paralleled with **being unfaithful** (*bāgad*). The term means ‘to act treacherously’. It is also associated with marital unfaithfulness (**5:7**; cf. **Jer. 3:20; 9:2**), and so links to the reference to prostitution in **verse 10** and may reflect the corruption within the priesthood.

James Mays: Apparently the incident at Adam involved some breach of a specific requirement of the covenant. The second measure interprets the crucial importance of the incident; any breach of covenant is a betrayal of Yahweh, violates the integrity of the personal relation between God and people.

2. (:8) City of Gilead

*“Gilead is a city of wrongdoers,
Tracked with bloody footprints.”*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: **Gilead** is singled out in the next verse as a city where murder reigned and covenant obligations were ignored.

Allen Guenther: The priests located at Gilead have refined the art of cursing one’s enemies, bringing hexes on people, and practicing sorcery for pay (here counted as robbery). They commit murder by casting spells on fellow Israelites. Thus the priests at Gilead, experts in sorcery, earned additional income by moonlighting. Their clients’ opponents in litigation or spirit included the faithful who went to worship at Shechem. This text, then, exposes the enormity of Israel’s religious perversions, the effects they have on the community, and the conflicting activities of priests within the cult of the Northern Kingdom.

Duane Garrett: The Hebrew of the last part of this verse is unusual. It means, as in the NIV, “*stained with footprints of blood.*” The choice of such a peculiar word and image must be deliberate, and the reason is in the fact that the root of the word for “*footprints*” is also the root of the name “*Jacob*.” Another curiosity of this verse is that it describes the inhabitants of Gilead as “*doers of wickedness*,” using the word *’āwen*, the same word that is used for the wordplay for **Bethel**, “*Beth Aven*.” Bethel was the place where Jacob as he fled Esau in Canaan, met God (**Gen 28:11–22**). Gilead, therefore, as the place where he was caught by Laban as he returned to Canaan, and as the region where he met the angel of God while preparing to face Esau, corresponds to Bethel as the end of Jacob's flight corresponds to its beginning. It is evident, therefore, that **Hosea is working the story of Jacob into his prophecy**; he will return to this story in **12:2–4**. The point here appears to be that the Israelites have taken on the worst characteristics of Jacob—selfishness and cunning—without having his redeeming experiences—encounters with God. They had no knowledge or experience of God comparable to Jacob's, who had a vision at Bethel and was renamed Israel in the region of Gilead. His descendants, instead of being transformed into Israel, into people of God, remained Jacob, a name that Hosea has transformed into the grim phrase, “*stained with footprints of blood.*”

Biblehub.com: Gilead, a region east of the Jordan River, was known for its balm, a healing ointment, yet here it is described as a place of wickedness. This contrast highlights the moral decay present in a place associated with healing. Historically, Gilead was part of the territory given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The reference to "*evildoers*" suggests rampant sin and corruption, possibly linked to idolatry and injustice, which were common issues addressed by the prophets. This phrase underscores the theme of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, a central message in Hosea.

3. (:9) City of Shechem

*"And as raiders wait for a man,
So a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem;
Surely they have committed crime."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Unlike the people of Gilead, the citizens of **Shechem** are not condemned, but rather a band of murdering priests is condemned, a group that had been terrorizing those trying to enter Shechem.

James Mays: Why would priests murder folk who were on the way to Shechem? It was one Israelite city against which Hosea directed no polemic. The ancient site had been a cultic centre associated with the Mosaic covenant tradition from the time of the conquest (**Deut. 27; Josh. 8.30ff.; 24**). Perhaps after the establishment of Jeroboam's state cult it continued to be a threatening competitor to the official shrines at Bethel and Dan, a hotbed of religious dissent against the state's cultic programme. Did the priests of the state cult go to the length of plotting for pilgrims to Shechem to be waylaid (**BK**)?

J. Andrew Dearman: For all of their obscurity to modern readers, the comparisons to Israel's folly in **Hos. 6:7–9** suggest political treachery with religious motivations, violence, and murder with the collusion of priests. It is a picture of the society coming apart. And one of the intriguing factors is the reference to Adam and Gilead. These places (and perhaps also the mention of Shechem) may represent a type of sectionalism, regional tensions, or geographic specificity to the dissolution of Israel.

Duane Garrett: The most notorious incident involving Shechem, however, was the slaughter of its inhabitants by Simeon and Levi in retaliation for the rape of Dinah (**Gen 34**). In this verse Hosea describes the priests as a gang of thugs who lie in wait for unsuspecting victims. This is a metaphor of ambush, and it cannot be accidental that Hosea alludes to a place where Levi, father of the priesthood, was guilty of treachery and mass murder. Furthermore, the assertion that the priests "*carry out a wicked plan*" appropriately describes the deceit of Simeon and Levi at Shechem (**Gen 34:13**).

Hosea has therefore once again used a threefold pattern involving places in Israel, but this time with a peculiar twist. Each place recalls the worst characteristics of one of the patriarchs. At Adam they broke faith with God as did Adam; at Gilead the people,

unlike Jacob, are entirely without grace; and at Shechem the sons of Levi renew the history of treacherous slaughter.

B. (:10-11a) Tracking Transgressions in Both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

1. (:10) House of Israel

*“In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;
Ephraim's harlotry is there, Israel has defiled itself.”*

James Mays: The final item in the catalogue deals with the entire house of Israel instead of a particular place. Its inclusiveness indicates that the specific charges in the foregoing lines were but illustrations of a guilt which belonged to the **whole nation**.

2. (:11a) House of Judah

“Also, O Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you,

Robin Routledge: *Harvest* (v. 11a) appears in the context of **judgment in Jeremiah 51:33 and Joel 3:13**. Most link this with judgment on Judah.

Allen Guenther: Lest Judah interpret the sins committed at Gilead as unique to the North, God includes the Southern Kingdom in the threat of judgment. *Harvest* may mean what is to be harvested, or the time of the harvest. Both may be intended. Their sins will be harvested by God on the day of judgment when the true nature of Judah's rebellion will be unveiled. *Harvest* occurs when the crop is ripe. That time is in God's hands. When he announces that the nation is ripe for judgment, it will receive its full “reward.”

James Mays: The will of Yahweh to rescue and bless his people is undiminished; he is faithful to his promise in the covenant. In spite of their sin he looks on Israel as ‘*my people*’, the folk whom his election has raised up to be ‘*my son*’ (11.1). ‘*To change the fortune*’ (*šūb šebūt*) is a figure of speech (literally, ‘*turn the turning*’) which means a return to an original starting point, a *restitutio in integrum*. It may have a background in the festival of New Year as the term for the expected change when God would take away the barrenness of the land and bring back its fertility with the seasonal rains. Generally in the OT the phrase is used in a historical rather than a natural frame of reference to speak of God's shift from the work of anger to the blessing of grace (e.g. **Lam. 2.14; Job 42.10**).

H. D. Beeby: The sentence about Judah (v. 11a) provides a different kind of ending. First, it is a **warning against complacency**. If Judah has sown the same seed as Ephraim (and they had) then they could expect the same harvest, sooner or later, as their northern counterpart. Disaster falling on Ephraim must be seen not as something to rejoice in, but as the shadow of a further disaster—the one that will come on Judah. Second, v. 11a **forms a conclusion meant for all succeeding readers and not only for contemporary Judah**. Obviously in the first place it was uttered as a warning to Judah; perhaps it was written by a Judean scribe anxious to draw the moral clearly even

though a touch pedantically and didactically. But whoever the author, he has made it quite clear that the words of Hosea possess unchanged value and were not uttered only for their own day. In later ages in differing contexts, although with very differing harmonies, they would sound the same tune. Thus the word to ancient Judah is still emphatically a word about our complacency and our apostasy, even about our harvest if we do not return.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Hosea constantly has both nations in view, and this line is parallel in intent to the statement at **5:5**. “*Harvest*” is used elsewhere as a description of a time of divine reckoning (**Isa 18:5**; **Jer 51:33**; **Joel 3:13**; cf. **Hos 10:13**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we substitute religious ritual and a desire to manipulate God for heartfelt reality and genuine loyalty and true knowledge?
- 2) In what way can God’s Word be destructive towards people today?
- 3) What type of judgment has God reserved for religious leaders who breed corruption and apostasy?
- 4) What more can God do to promote faithfulness and covenant love?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: If Israel’s relationship with the Lord is to work, it requires a steadfast loyalty to God. Yet the loyalty of Ephraim and Judah is like mist and dew that quickly vanishes. This covenant unfaithfulness has been the object of prophetic attack, with God striking his people with the covenant curses (**Lev 26:14-45**). God desires relationship and covenant loyalty more than sacrifices, a key Old Testament theme (**1Sa 15:22-23**; **Mic 6:6-8**). Adam in **Hosea 6:7** could refer to the first human or to a place on the Jordan River (cf. **Jos 3:16**). Ephraim and Judah have violated the national covenant (cf. **Hos 8:1**). This is seen especially in the towns of Adam and Gilead, and also on the road to Shechem, where priests terrorize like a mob of murderous gangsters. Ephraim’s promiscuity could refer to the people’s idolatry, to actual sexual activity outside of marriage, or to both. Israel’s defilement is contagious, and Judah also will be judged (**6:10-11**).

Jeremy Thomas: The Nation’s Failure to Learn Loyalty

You will see God Himself desperate to get His people to respond to His love. God is in a marriage with the nation Israel and He is the perfect husband and He has initiated with her continually. He has given Himself to her continually. He has showered her with His

love and with His grace and yet she has not responded to His advances; she has gone negative volition to her right God and she has responded to other gods. You see in Hosea the tremendous personality of God in ways you never see in any other OT book. By way of parallel God is very involved and very interested in our lives as NT believers. He pursues you, He comes after you, He loves you and He wants you to respond to Him. He doesn't just sit back and say, oh well, believer so and so doesn't want to respond to Me. God is very concerned that you respond to Him. So concerned that He will discipline you, often very severely. God's discipline always comes out of His love. Therefore if you are experiencing God's discipline you are experiencing God's love and it shows He cares enough about you to expend His time and energy on getting you in shape for your eternal destiny. So watch for God's reaction to the people of Israel. . .

The **biblical idea of law** is that you violated a Person's character. You're attacking God. Law is not just a piece of paper. And until you realize that every time you break the law of Christ you're attacking the Person of Christ you'll never get what law is really all about. Law is about revelation of God's character. The Law expresses who He is. And that's why it says in **v 7, you have dealt treacherously against Me**. It doesn't say you dealt treacherously against a piece of paper. It says you dealt treacherously against Me. Me is a person. And that's the point of biblical law, always behind the law is the Lawgiver, and when we violate the law it's a violation of the Person behind the law. . .

And now we come to the results in **vv 8-11**. We've looked at the general principle, the principle being that the nation Israel failed to learn loyalty to God, they had seven centuries to learn it, and they didn't learn it. Now we see the results of not learning it

Jason Van Bommel: Here in Hosea 6, we get some insight from the Lord's perspective on toxic religion and what God desires instead. Here in these verses, we see that corrupt and vile religion is fickle (**v. 4**), formalist (**v. 6**), and financially driven (**v. 9**).

David Thompson: **God describes what He actually sees . 6:7-10**

God does not see loyalty or commitment to His Word. Instead, He sees eight horrible acts:

Horrible Act #1 - God's people have transgressed the covenant. **6:7a**

What this statement means is that God's people didn't obey God's Word; they did just the opposite like Adam. They didn't pay any attention to the Word of God.

Horrible Act #2 - God's people have dealt treacherously against God. **6:7b**

The word "*treacherous*" is interesting because what it means is that these people were frauds who intentionally clothed themselves to look like they were right with God when, in fact, they were not.

Horrible Act #3 - God's people were tolerating corrupt cities. **6:8a**

God singles out specific places like Gilead, which apparently were known for evil crimes.

Horrible Act #4 - God's people had bloody footprints. **6:8b**

They were going to worship services having committed horrible crimes.

Horrible Act #5 - God's priests were committing murders . **6:9**

What they did was connected to Shechem? Truth is we don't know. But it is very clear that these priests were not interested in pursuing knowledge of the Word of God. They were doing evil things. The religious leaders were ruthless. They were lurking men not seeking to get people the knowledge of God, but seeking to destroy them for personal gain. If we turn back the clock to the Reformation, we can see a literal illustration of this very evil. Priests of the Roman Church were lurking in an attempt to kill Martin Luther. But God's sovereign, protective hand was on Luther and they did not succeed.

Horrible Act #6 - God's people did horrible things. **6:10a**

The word "*horrible*" describes something extremely bad. God does not tell us what it is, but if God classifies it as horrible, it must be something very depraved beyond the norm

Horrible Act #7 - God's people did immoral things. **6:10b**

Immoral sex has always been a problem around some of God's people. These people are heading for the judgment of God.

Horrible Act #8 - God's people defiled themselves. **6:10c**

This word "*defile*" means God's people were doing things God classified as unclean and impure. God's people were a sinful mess. Now we would expect at this point to read a text in which God would say, "I will blast My people." "I will damn My people." "I will destroy My people." But look at the next theme.

THEME #5 – God describes what He will eventually do to His people. **6:11**

Look carefully at the end of **verse 11**. You read this verse and you say, you have got to be kidding me. God will restore the fortunes of His people. His people have done evil and perverse things and God says I will "*restore the fortunes of My people.*"

Now we must ask why in the world would God do that? Because God's people are God's family and He still loves His family.

What an amazing God. I do not know how far you have wandered away from God. I do not know all of the perverse sin that is in your life. What I do know is that if you, as a prodigal, will turn back to God, He will restore His blessings on you because He loves you. That is the message of Hosea 6.

Come back to God and go after the knowledge of God and God's blessings will be yours.

TEXT: Hosea 7:1-16

TITLE: *DISINTEGRATION OF A NATION THAT REFUSES TO RETURN TO THE LORD*

BIG IDEA:

WHEN THERE IS NO TURNING BACK TO THE LORD, MORAL CORRUPTION LEADS TO POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION OF A NATION (BOTH INTERNALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY)

INTRODUCTION:

H. D. Beeby: The RSV translation attaches **6:11b** to **ch. 7**. This is acceptable and makes good sense. It also helps to complete a discernible structure within the chapter which, although perhaps not originally intended, does not do violence to the content; rather it provides a form which enables the context to be more easily grasped. The whole divides into four parts: **6:11b–7:2**; **7:3–7**; **7:8–12**; **7:13–16**. Of these, the first and the fourth are similar, as are the second and third. The first and the last are laments from the mouth of God, so that the style and form are comparable. Also, they are concerned with the covenantal aspect of Israel's circumstances, that is, with the relationships between God and Israel on which all else depends. Parts two and three deal with political matters. The former concentrates on internal affairs and in particular on the intrigue and violence that surround the tottering monarchy. The latter turns to external problems, especially the diplomatic maneuvering that the threat of war had prompted. We have then, sandwiched between covenantal concerns, two layers of the political; or between the "religious," the ethical; between the vertical, the horizontal; between the God/human relationship, the human/human relationship. The form of the poem is accordingly expressive of its content. The outward in some measure reveals the inward, because the message of the passage is that human existence is a unity in which the things of earth cannot be divorced from our dealings with heaven.

Derek Kidner: Number of scathing images of corrupt and impotent society:

- Inedible cake (:8)
- Man who imagines he is still in his prime (:9)
- Frantic dove (:11-12)
- Flawed weapon (:16a)

Robin Routledge: The focus on Ephraim in **7:1–2** provides a **bridge** from the wider indictment of all the people to what appears to be a more specific indictment of the northern kingdom.

The reference to a baker's oven (**7:4, 7**) marks verses 3–7 as a separate subsection, dealing primarily with internal political intrigue (cf. **6:9**). The setting may be the Syro-Ephraimite war and its aftermath, though it may have wider significance. Reference to kings falling (**v. 7b**) will include the assassination of Pekahiah by Pekah, though may indicate, too, the death of Pekah at the hands of Hoshea (**2 Kgs 15:30**) and, possibly,

earlier murders leading to Menahem's accession (2 Kgs 15:8–14). Calling on Assyria (v. 11) may reflect Hoshea's request for support after the Syro-Ephraimite conflict (2 Kgs 17:3), though may also relate to Menahem (2 Kgs 15:19).

Verses 8–16 focus on Israel's relationship with the nations. The reference to Egypt (v. 11) may allude to Hoshea enlisting Egyptian support for his eventual rebellion against Assyria (2 Kgs 17:4), so may be later than the previous verses. The two subsections are linked by the baking imagery (7:8) and may be best viewed as a single unit (Ben Zvi 2005: 149–150; Lim and Castelo 2015: 136). Even if taken separately, they may be seen to represent complementary aspects of Israel's unfaithfulness (Dearman 2010: 207). Andersen and Freedman (1980: 447, 462) take the two sections to reflect aspects of 'the state of the nation'.

David Thompson: MY OWN PEOPLE ARE SO FAR REMOVED FROM A TRUE RELATIONSHIP WITH ME BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN THAT THEY DO NOT EVEN RECOGNIZE THEIR PATHETIC CONDITION AND THEIR NEED TO TURN TO GOD, SO GOD WILL PERMIT HORRIFIC THINGS TO HAPPEN TO HIS PEOPLE.

What is described in this chapter should be a warning to us as a nation. It should be a warning to us as a church and it should be a warning to us as an individual. It is possible to become so calloused in our sin and in evil stuff that we do not even recognize that God is hitting us with a string of negatives in an attempt to get us to turn back to Him. Let's face it; Israel has not recognized this for 2400 years. She just doesn't get it.

I. (:1-2) MORAL DISINTEGRATION OF SOCIETY

A. (:1) Transgression of Israel Prevents Healing by God

*“When I would heal Israel, The iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered,
And the evil deeds of Samaria, For they deal falsely;
The thief enters in, Bandits raid outside,”*

Trent Butler: Crime prevails. Government has lost control. The capital city of Israel does not deserve God's healing touch.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Three kinds of disobedient behavior give concrete expression to the accusation (7:1).

- They “practice deceit,”
- “*thieves break into houses*,”
- and “*bandits rob*”—

words that recall the general indictment of 4:2 as well as the accusation of 6:7–9. Perhaps this disobedience is what is happening in the city of Samaria itself. **The social fabric is disintegrating.**

Allen Guenther: **Burglary** describes entry into people's homes; **vandalism and looting** capture the idea of stripping clothes and valuables off the bodies of war victims. Why

this list is so short and narrow in scope is unclear. It may be illustrative. It takes us through a range of sins from the hidden to the most blatant acts of outrage, acts which everyone recognizes as immoral.

David Allan Hubbard: These verses, which describe evil as both encompassing Israel and witnessed by God (revealed in **7:1**; cf. on **2:10**; before my face; cf. **Job 26:6**; **Ps. 38:9**; **Prov. 15:11**), seem to combine two biblical pictures of judgment: sin spawns its own consequences – ‘*Be sure your sin will find you out*’ (**Num. 32:23**); sin is judged by God personally – ‘*I, even I, will rend and go away*’ (**Hos. 5:14**). There is, of course, no essential conflict between these views, since God is the author of order in the creation, and part of that order is a pattern of retribution and reward.

Biblehub: and thieves break in -- This phrase illustrates the lawlessness and lack of security within the society. The imagery of thieves breaking in suggests a breakdown of social order and justice.

bandits raid in the streets-- The presence of bandits raiding in the streets indicates a society in chaos, where violence and crime are rampant. This reflects the consequences of turning away from God's laws, leading to societal disintegration.

B. (:2) Transparency before God Contrasted with Blindness of Israel

*“And they do not consider in their hearts That I remember all their wickedness.
Now their deeds are all around them; They are before My face.”*

Trent Butler: Israel plays politics even with God, not thinking God will remember and repay their evil deeds, just like politicians do not follow through on their promises. How could God forget? The evidence stares him in the face.

H. D. Beeby: The present poem begins with a lament from God that bemoans Israel's frustration of all God's plans to redeem them. God's dilemma at not being able to do as he wishes is not unlike the brief dialogue with himself in **6:4**; and what he wants to do—namely, restore Israel's fortunes and heal them—is his response to the “confession” in **6:1–3**. The expression translated “*restore the fortunes*” consists of the double use of a verb that means “*turn*”; a literal translation would be something like “turn the turning” or “return the returning,” which is not very helpful. Perhaps it is of help to point out that the verb is the one used by some OT writers when they call upon Israel to return to God, that is, to repent. Did Hosea deliberately choose this verb, not only to introduce the theme of penitence, but also to hint that in repenting Israel would not be dependent merely on their own resources? It would be God who would be doing the “turning the turning” in order to restore Israel's fortunes. Such an interpretation is supported by the use in the parallel line of the verb “to heal.” This verb in Hosea includes the ideas of forgiveness and redemption. . .

They are deficient in everything: in all virtue and in all true devotion, and now they are shown to be blind. Yet it is God who laments, not Israel. Thus contrasts and paradoxes mount. God, in offering to restore Israel and heal them, conveniently forgets, so to

speak, that they are incapable of accepting. Now the same God remembers all. Israel is surrounded by incontrovertible evidence and proof, yet they are totally unaware and, apparently, content with things as they are. This blithe spirit romps down the road to ruin, not having understood the fundamental fact of their faith—that heaven and earth are one, and religion and behavior are inseparable.

J. Andrew Dearman: The conclusion in 7:2 is somber, indeed chilling. Israel has not considered the consequences of their iniquity, although God remembered their deeds. Implicit in the verb “*to remember*” (*zākar*) is the bringing of something to mind in a conscious fashion, so that the matter is in some sense “before” or “with” a person, and then he or she is **prepared to respond** to it. To remember is tantamount to perceiving something and then reacting to it, whereas the nuance of “forgetting” is not thinking of a matter consciously. And since the matter is not present, a person is not prepared to respond to it. The connection between “remembering” and “reaction” is depicted in 7:2. Tragically Israel has not taken to heart (lit. “*said in their heart*”) that God remembers. One could paraphrase the expression by saying that Israel does not remember that God remembers. The matter is one of act and consequence: Israel’s deeds are “*before*” God, who is prepared to react in judgment and oversee the reaping of consequences.

Duane Garrett: Yahweh says that when he looks at Israel all he sees is guilt; there is no atonement to cover their sin. “*Their sins engulf them*” (literally, “*their deeds surround them*”) in the context of v. 2 does not mean that crime is overwhelming society (v. 1b has already established that). Rather, it means that no matter from what angle Yahweh looks at Israel, all he sees is their evil doings.

Derek Kidner: To paraphrase this verse, guilt does not fade with time; it wraps a people round; it stares God in the face.

Gary Smith: Most surprising is the utter **callousness** of the people toward these sinful acts. They do not seem to realize that these deeds are evil. Apparently these sins are normal, acceptable behavior in this society, since everyone seems to be doing them. They think nothing of these crimes and do not think God is paying any attention to them (**Hos. 7:2**). Their Canaanite worldview has eliminated a holy God of justice, who sees, hates, and punishes sin. In contrast to their blindness to sin, the stench of their vile lives has come up to God because he sees everything they are doing. These sins destroy the people’s covenant relationship with God.

James Mays: What one line could better sum up the profound theological failure of Israel! – it never enters their mind that the real issue between them and their God is the evil of their lives. The erosion of Canaanite ways of religious thinking has erased any real understanding of Yahweh; the knowledge of him whom to choose is to choose the good of his will is gone. They do not remember the history of Yahweh’s revelation, but he remembers the history of their sin. Now their deeds surround them like the wall of a prison; they have become what they have done (cf. 5.4). When they turn to Yahweh in worship and stand in his presence, he is ready to heal and restore. But when he looks upon them he must see the reality before him – the evil, the iniquity, the sin.

II. (:3-7) POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION OF SOCIETY -- PALACE INTRIGUE AND REVOLT – SIGNS OF CORRUPTION

H. D. Beeby: Two sets of images are brought together: a corrupt and conspiring court and a stifling baker's kitchen. Although these images are not normally associated, in this instance they marry effectively to give a picture of the heat and horrors of palace intrigue. . .

These verses were originally concerned with a group who plotted successfully to murder their king, possibly helped by a compliant baker who overslept. However, we have received the story not in its original setting but in the context of God's word of judgment and mercy to Israel. In the new context its meaning has been extended and has become something typical and symbolic. It is now about a people and its politics, in particular about how that people has treated another of God's great gifts—the gift of kingship.

Derek Kidner: Now we penetrate the palace, to find the king and his courtiers not only doing nothing to stem the tide of evil, but revelling in it, titillated by it, relishing the prevailing graft and trickery (3), and letting their lusts take over.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The plot line is not hard to follow (vv.3, 5, 7b). The passage depicts a conspiracy against the king, which involved a drunken feast and led to an assassination. **Verse 7** says that “*their rulers*” (lit., “*judges*”) and “*all their kings*” have fallen. These plurals suggest multiple deaths, circumstances that match the closing decades of the northern kingdom

J. Andrew Dearman: Most interpreters agree that the “*plotting*” in 7:3–7 represents one or more of the regicides of the mid-8th century. The difficulty comes in discerning who was in league with Menahem, Pekah or Hoshea, in fomenting the various regime changes during Hosea's day.

Andrew Guenther: The arena of politics exposes another sphere of covenantal unfaithfulness. Israel's political life is volatile; expediency rules. God's design is that the nation's leaders act as moral guides for the nation. Instead, they themselves wander astray.

The entire passage has a chiastic shape:

7:3	the condition of king and princes
7:4a	adulterers = rebels = inflamed persons
7:4b-6	palace intrigue and revolt
7:7a	gluttons = rebels = inflamed persons
7:7b	the condition of kings

David Allan Hubbard: The priests remain the subject of the action, as they have, since **4:4** and **6:7** (cf. **6:9**). *They, their* and *them* point uniformly to the priests who stood at the centre of the conspiracy.

James Mays: The political energy of Israel is a burning anger that is devouring the very monarchy in which it trusts. Kings are enthroned in Israel only to fall. Yet, through all this self-defeating history, it occurs to no one to appeal to the Lord who made them instead of the kings they make. The five verses are a divine saying (v. 7) in which Yahweh describes the political life of Israel as a creation of evil and an engine of wrath which rushes toward its own end with no appeal to him. The oracle remains at the level of accusation throughout and never moves to the announcement of judgment. Instead, the final line of v. 7 rings like a lament which implies a doom inherent in the nation's failure which works its own punishment. The saying is built around one of Hosea's characteristic metaphors. The image of the baker's oven (vv. 4, 6, 7) is used to bring to light the passionate wrath that drives Israel's political life.

A. (:3) Sign of Corruption = Leaders Pleased with Wickedness

*"With their wickedness they make the king glad,
And the princes with their lies."*

Biblehub: **They delight the king with their evil** -- In the context of Hosea, the northern kingdom of Israel is depicted as being in a state of moral and spiritual decay. The "king" here likely refers to one of the monarchs of Israel during Hosea's ministry, possibly Jeroboam II or one of his successors. The phrase suggests that the king finds pleasure or satisfaction in the wickedness of his people, indicating a corrupt leadership that encourages or at least tolerates evil practices. This reflects a broader theme in Hosea where leaders are held accountable for leading the people astray (**Hosea 4:9**). The delight in evil can be seen as a reversal of the king's role, which should be to uphold justice and righteousness (**Proverbs 16:12**).

and the princes with their lies -- The "*princes*" refer to the ruling officials or nobles who assist the king in governance. Their delight in lies suggests a culture of deceit and manipulation within the leadership. This aligns with the broader biblical narrative where falsehood and deception are condemned (**Proverbs 12:22**). The lies could involve false prophecies, misleading policies, or betrayal of covenants, which were common issues in Israel's history (**Jeremiah 23:14**). The acceptance and propagation of lies by the leaders contribute to the nation's downfall, as truth and integrity are foundational to a just society. This also foreshadows the ultimate judgment that God will bring upon Israel for their unfaithfulness and corruption (**Hosea 7:13**).

H. D. Beeby: The king is shown to be corrupt because he is pleased by corruption (v. 3). An existing weakness of his is played upon, magnified, and taken advantage of—a weakness shared by the inner ring of the powerful. The plotter had an easy task, as the defense had already been breached by the monarch's own personal vice.

James Mays: The new occupant of the throne assumes power in the midst of festive joy and self-satisfaction at his success. But the prophet sees that this joy has been created by evil. The singular ‘king’ suggests that Hosea describes some particular one of the many throne-changes in Israel’s recent history, probably the coronation of Hoshea ben Elah in 733. Behind Hoshea’s rise to power lay the will to murder and the plotting of deceitful treachery as the assassination of Pekah was arranged. Undoubtedly some of the conspirators had sworn allegiance to the king they betrayed. A king should rejoice in justice and righteousness, but here is one whose joy is the fruit of violent evil. With the installation of such a king Yahweh has nothing to do; indeed his inauguration is an act of rebellion against him (8.4).

B. (:4) Sign of Corruption = Flaming the Fires of Lust for Power

*“They are all adulterers Like an oven heated by the baker,
Who ceases to stir up the fire
From the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.”*

Trent Butler: An everyday example of such burning heat comes from the baker's oven used for baking bread. The oven is so hot that the baker doesn't have to stoke it for a long time. The politicians are similar—so inflamed that their adultery is certain to last a long time.

David Allan Hubbard: The priestly political treachery is underscored by **adulterers** (cf. Ephraim’s harlotry in **6:10**). Their passions burned towards goals that violated the covenant that was theirs to uphold. The oven and baker similes make this clear. The baker’s negligent watch of the oven, so that its fire kept blazing while the dough was rising, led to an intolerable result: the one who should have guarded the king left him defenceless, ready to be scorched by the red-hot oven of **conspiracy**.

David Allan Hubbard: The **identity of the baker** is harder to determine (vv. 4, 6). In the latter verse his presence is obscured by the tendency of commentators and versions to repoint the Hebrew word to read ‘*their anger*’ (but see **Andersen**, pp. 447, 449–454). Both references to the baker’s work suggest an idleness, a sleeping at the switch, that contributes to the conspiracy against the king. If the idleness is passive neglect, then the baker probably depicts a chief court official whose task was to assure the security of the king; if the idleness is maliciously intended, the baker may be identified as the chief priest (see on **4:4**) who used his position to trick the king into trusting him, when all the while treason was his goal. These verses are obscure and ambiguous enough to keep any interpretation somewhat tentative.

Alternate View:

Duane Garrett: We thus find that this baker is noted primarily for his **inactivity**—he desists from kneading the dough while the leaven does its work, and sleeps all night while the fire in the oven gets larger and larger. It would seem, therefore, that the baker is the king who, by inattentiveness due to his debauchery with wine and “sleep” (which may allude to the adulteries of **v. 4**), allows evil and conspiracy to flourish. If leaven in B (**v. 4**) is metaphorical, as it often is, for the pervasive influence of evil, we can

understand why Hosea included this picture of a baker who does nothing while leaven spreads through the dough. This is a king who does nothing while evil (leaven) spreads through society and the court.

Biblehub: from the kneading to the rising of the dough -- This phrase indicates a period of time, suggesting that the people's sinful desires are constant and enduring. The process from kneading to rising involves waiting and preparation, symbolizing how the people's hearts are continually set on sin. This can be connected to **James 1:14-15**, where desire, when fully grown, gives birth to sin. The imagery of bread-making, a daily and essential task, underscores the normalcy and acceptance of sin in their lives.

C. (:5-7) Sign of Corruption = Participating in Treacherous Conspiracy

1. (:5) Loss of Moral Clarity and Discernment

*"On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine;
He stretched out his hand with scoffers,"*

James Mays: Verse 5 seems to describe the **stratagem** by which the palace revolt is accomplished. When all is ready the conspirators arrange for the officials of the present king to be drunk. While they are intoxicated and the king is defenceless, they strike. The assassination of Elah by Zimri in 876 was carried off while the court was drunk (**I Kings 16.8–14**) and the strategy may well have been used on other occasions. The '*day of their king*' would seem to mean the coronation day of the candidate in whose behalf the conspirators acted. Did assassination and enthronement occur on the same day? It might have in the midst of the political chaos in 733. Hoshea's kingship after all was a creature of the nation's desperation over the failure of Pekah's anti-Assyrian policy. The third measure of **v. 5** is obscure. Literally it reads: '*his hand draws scorners*', which may be a comment about wine to the effect that it has power to attract the loud-mouthed who are vulnerable to its appeal. Others take it to mean that '*he [the king?] made common cause with the rebels*' (**ATD**, cf. RSV).

Biblehub: The princes are inflamed with wine -- This phrase highlights the moral and spiritual decay among the leaders of Israel. The princes, who should be examples of righteousness and wisdom, are instead indulging in excess and losing their discernment. This behavior reflects a broader cultural acceptance of indulgence and lack of self-control, which is condemned throughout Scripture (**Proverbs 20:1, Ephesians 5:18**). The imagery of being "*inflamed with wine*" suggests not only drunkenness but also a loss of moral clarity and judgment, which is a recurring theme in the prophetic literature as a sign of impending judgment (**Isaiah 28:7**).

2. (:6) Lust for Power Smolders and then Erupts

*"For their hearts are like an oven As they approach their plotting;
Their anger smolders all night,
In the morning it burns like a flaming fire."*

Lloyd Ogilvie: In Hosea's day an oven was about three feet in length, cylindrical in form, with the walls sloping to an open aperture at the top. Fire was set in the oven

early in the morning, and the flames would leap up through the top. Later, when the walls were thoroughly hot, the fire would be removed and the flat cakes of kneaded dough would be slapped on the inside walls of the oven.

J. Andrew Dearman: v. 6 -- The comparison seems to be that of political intrigue to a fire that smolders at night and heats up in the morning. This is apparently the depiction of the plotters and their designs, which get further elaboration in v. 7.

Biblehub; while they lie in wait -- This phrase indicates a period of anticipation and plotting. The imagery of lying in wait suggests a predatory nature, akin to a hunter or an enemy preparing to ambush. This reflects the treacherous behavior of Israel's leaders and people, who were often involved in conspiracies and betrayal, as seen in the historical accounts of Israel's kings in **2 Kings**. The idea of waiting also implies a lack of immediate action, highlighting the patience and cunning involved in their sinful plans.

all night their anger smolders -- The night is often associated with secrecy and evil deeds in Scripture, as seen in **John 3:19-20**, where people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. The smoldering anger suggests a slow-burning, unresolved wrath that festers over time. This can be linked to the internalization of sin and bitterness, which eventually leads to destructive actions. The imagery of smoldering indicates that the anger is not yet visible but is ready to erupt, similar to how unresolved anger can lead to sin, as warned in **Ephesians 4:26-27**.

James Mays: When the plot breaks into the open, the hot passion of the conspirators is like the oven fire which is stirred and fed at morning until the flames leap out of the oven door. If the sequence of words in MT's text are rearranged, the first line can be translated: *'When they draw near in their ambush/their heart is like the oven.'* The sense is essentially the same.

Douglas Stuart: The passion of the king, his court officials, and the influential nobility is likened to a baker's oven so hot that the baker need not tend the fire during the entire baking process. The heat of their treachery and transgression drives them to take matters into their own hands, ignoring Yahweh in their maneuverings.

Robin Routledge: The heat of the oven might indicate the burning ambition that drives treachery (cf. vv. 6, 7). . .

The oven of lust and ambition has become so hot that it consumes the institutions of state that maintain government and ensure fairness and decency in society.

3. (:7) Loyalty Nonexistent

*"All of them are hot like an oven, And they consume their rulers;
All their kings have fallen. None of them calls on Me."*

H. D. Beeby: The oven image dominates. The heat spreads to everything, temperatures rise, passions inflame; anger which had been smouldering now bursts forth and becomes a blazing fire that burns up the ruler, and before long will consume the kingdom.

James Mays: In v. 7 the oracle reaches its **climax**. The accusation against Israel's political life is summarized in an inclusive statement which repeats the metaphor of the oven. The entire tragic history of the monarchy is subsumed under the particular incident just described. And the divine reaction to what has happened is offered in a final cry. '*All of them are ... like an oven*' is a reprise of vv. 4–6. The inner dynamics of the entire political history of the northern kingdom has been a fiery anger. Israelite statecraft was driven by a passion that inevitably destroyed its own achievements. Their rulers ... their kings have fallen prey to their consuming wrath. The prophet sees that the genius of Israel has been their attempt at autonomy. In spite of the state's public religion they had always sought a nation which possessed its own security and justification – and, when a king did not bring about the consummation of this dream, the passion which created him became the wrath that destroyed him. Like every revolutionary state that has no faith in anything beyond itself, Israel was burning up in its own anger.

Trent Butler: **All their kings fall.** This is a historical reflection on the final years of the Northern Kingdom when one royal family replaced another in quick succession through political coups and assassinations.

How could God's people get into such a condition? Hosea had one quick answer: none of them calls on me. Even in the period of the judges with all its intrigue, sin, and false religion, Israel returned to call on God for help in time of trouble. This generation was worse than that one. They ignored their only source of help, even when the Lord stood ready to heal.

This is God's lament. His people are so busy partying that they ignore him. How could he possibly restore their fortunes or heal their wounds? Harvest time approaches for the nations of Israel and Judah.

Duane Garrett: The lack of strong government brings about an atmosphere of chaos and self-promotion unchecked by honor or integrity. The same ovenlike burning that characterized passions for adultery in B also characterizes lust for power (D'–C'–B' [vv. 6–7a]). The result is that society is in chaos and decent government is swallowed up by those who only want power (B' [v. 7a]). In the end the king himself is destroyed in a political world that has abandoned God (A' [v. 7b]).

Gary Smith: This human tragedy [of political assassination] takes place again and again (four kings are assassinated), but none of these violent people ever inquires of God about what they are doing. These murderers do not seek him to gain wisdom; they have the scoffing mockers to guide them. They do not wait for God to send a prophet to anoint the next king; they depend on cunning plots of deceit to remove and set up new

kings. They are not concerned about doing what delights God because they are only concerned about what delights themselves. They do not even ask God for help because they slyly make alliances with one group or another to protect their interests. God's role of choosing each new king for the nation is usurped by vicious plots to grab power through violence.

III. (:8-12) FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENTS – LOOKING FOR HELP IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Trent Butler: vv. 8-16 -- Seeking help from anyone but God is foolish, and it leads to destruction.

Gary Smith: These alliances are hurting the nation because they require payment of heavy tribute and encourage cultural and religious compromises to keep the peace with the Assyrians. This syncretistic trend drains the nation of its financial resources, its independence, and its moral strength (7:9). The surprising thing is that the people do not see how this creeping compromising (like the slow process of getting gray hair) is gradually undermining their identity. These are selfish acts of pride and self-determination that are not based on God's direction (7:10). Israel's leaders act independently and without reliance on God. Why should they bother mixing religion with their politics by asking God what he wants? Are they not able to handle things themselves through their alliances? How can God ever help the situation? Now that they have peace with Assyria, everything will be fine.

A. Fatal Consequences from Foreign Alliances

1. (:8) Unpalatable Foreign Alliances

*“Ephraim mixes himself with the nations;
Ephraim has become a cake not turned.”*

H. D. Beeby: Israel's place was not intended to be among the nations (**Num. 23:9**). It was to be a people apart, belonging to God, a peculiar people in every sense. Yet Israel had deliberately repudiated this peculiarity and chosen to associate itself with the nations. A rejection of identity is implied: a deliberate choosing of a forbidden way—in fact, not just any forbidden way, but the most prohibited way of all. The choice of an identity among the nations rather than the identity given by God through election was equivalent to idolatry or, to use Hosea's language, equivalent to harlotry, because alignment with the nations involved the accepting of their gods and a loosening of Israel's hold on the living God. . .

To put their faith in the nations rather than in God draws forth the appropriate comment that Ephraim is half-baked. Cakes in those days were placed close to the inside wall of the oven, and when one side was brown the cake was turned over so that the other side could be baked. Ephraim was still unturned, declares Hosea, and therefore burned on one side and raw on the other. It is the same picture as we found in vv. 3–7: immaturity combined with excessive heat that burns immoderately. The verb here is different, but it

is not impossible that a link with the constant demand that Ephraim “turn and return” is intended. But an Ephraim who can be insane enough to choose Egypt and Assyria rather than God is destined always to be on the wrong side.

Trent Butler: Traditionally this has been explained as a cake needing to be flipped from one side to the other during cooking to keep one side from being burned while the other remains doughy. This would describe a nation so hard on one side that God cannot find entrance but so soft on the other that all the nations take advantage of it. More recently scholars have doubted whether such flat bread needed to be turned and have looked to the process of kneading and folding the bread before baking. This would continue the description of idleness and irresponsibility pictured in **Hosea 7:1–7**. Either way, Israel's identity is no longer determined by their relationship with God. It is now determined by their socializing and politicizing with foreign nations and foreign gods.

2. (:9) Unknowing Dissipation of Strength and Vitality

*“Strangers devour his strength, Yet he does not know it;
Gray hairs also are sprinkled on him, Yet he does not know it.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: Two familiar points are made. First, Ephraim is in bad straits. Second, the nation does not recognize its dire circumstances. This is further comment on the negative consequences of being mixed up among the nations in the previous verse.

H. D. Beeby: **Verse 9** takes up the point about stupidity, joining it to ignorance on an heroic scale. For incredibly Ephraim chooses the alien nations even though the aliens have proved their hostility by devouring Ephraim's strength. The Ephraimites have been blind to the changes from the outside; they are equally unaware of the internal weakening. They are getting old, and either can't or won't admit it. Or it is possible that the white hairs are the white hairs of mold? If so, this would fit with the cake metaphor—the nation is half-baked and moldy but doesn't know it. Such darkness of mind! How can any people which doesn't know its own age know God?

Trent Butler: Israel is so mixed up and confused that its people do not know who they are. They think they are party guests honored by the host nations. They think they are still youngsters with nothing better to do than have a good time. Instead, they are old men being eaten alive, losing all their strength and vitality while partying rather than serving God as a “*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” (**Exod. 19:6**).

James Mays: Everywhere in the body politic are the marks of a dying nation. Weak and greyed, the people totter toward death – and they act as though they are unaware of what is happening to them.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: “*Grey hair*” could mean **mold**, thus reinforcing that the bread is inedible (**Andersen and Freedman**, 467–68; **Hubbard**, 139–40; **Garrett**, 170). But grey hair may also denote **old age** and decrepitude. The end result is the same—**uselessness**. Israel through its foreign policies has become **worthless**.

David Allan Hubbard: Ephraim's stupidity is stated even more blatantly. *'He himself did not know'* that:

(1) his agricultural and economic strength was being eaten up by tribute paid to aliens (*'foreigners'*, a term used in 5:7 to describe the bastard children produced by the fornication of the cult), as the priests had devoured Ephraim's judges (v. 7); and

(2) his whole way of life had turned rotten with mould that grows its repulsive gray hairs on over-aged food. This interpretation (see **Andersen**, pp. 467–468) has the advantage of preserving the culinary metaphor and of avoiding the question of why gray hairs would be viewed negatively here, when biblical people usually saw them as a badge of blessing (**Prov. 20:29**).

3. (:10) Unrepentant Prideful Spirit

*"Though the pride of Israel testifies against him,
Yet they have neither returned to the LORD their God,
Nor have they sought Him, for all this."*

Trent Butler: They refuse to do the basic things God requires—**return to the LORD** (see comments on **Hos. 6:1**) and **search for him** (see **Hos. 2:7; 3:5; 5:6, 15**). God laments such behavior and the destruction it brings. Israel just keeps on having a good time.

J. Andrew Dearman: Hosea apparently regarded the diplomacy of his day as a compromise of Israel's holy identity and an affront to YHWH's sovereignty over his people. It is not clear that Hosea was opposed in principle to the political give-and-take with Egypt and Assyria, but that may have been the case. He is convinced that YHWH has not endorsed the actions and they are thus a betrayal of the covenant between people and Deity.

John Goldingay: To put it yet another way (v. 10), as a consequence Ephraim's impressiveness has disappeared. It used to be more imposing than little Judah, but no longer (see **2 Kings 15:19–20, 29; 17:3**). As Hosea threatened, this diminishing has happened before its own eyes (5:5), but Ephraim still hasn't returned to Yahweh or sought help from him. Hosea again takes up the verb *'ānā (is humbled)* and the linked expressions *"turn back"* and *"seek help"* that were used earlier in that connection (5:4–6; cf. 2:7 [9]; 3:5; 5:15–6:1).

Allen Guenther: Pride and genuine repentance are mutually exclusive. One cannot strut proudly into God's presence to make a confession of sin. Israel fails to acknowledge the One who invites them back. The implication, reinforced in **7:14**, is that the nation no longer recognizes the distinction between Yahweh and the other gods. They appeal to him as they do to idols.

David Thompson: As **verse 10** says, God's people were **proud** and they did not return to God or seek God. Do not miss this, the reason why most people will not turn to God

and to His Word is because they are proud. They are proud of their worship; they are proud of their religion; they are proud of themselves. Pride will always keep people from returning to the Lord.

B. (:11-12) Fowler Nets the Senseless Dove

1. (:11) Senselessness of Depending on Foreign Powers

*“So Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without sense;
They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.”*

James Mays: During the career of Hosea the international policy of Israel swung back and forth between Assyria and Egypt like a pendulum. Menahem was quick to submit to Tiglath-pileser at the cost of a vast tribute (**II Kings 15.19f.**). Pekah joined the coalition formed to resist Assyria’s power (**II Kings 15.37**); possibly the allies hoped for Egyptian aid. Hoshea came to the throne in a shift back to Menahem’s policy of submission to Assyria, but later appealed to Egypt (**II Kings 17.4**) and revolted. Using one of his ready metaphors, Hosea compares the nation to a silly dove that is easily deceived. The way the comparison is stated in **v. 11** and extended in **v. 12** suggests that the dove is thought of as a bird with such little sense as to be trapped easily. To the prophet’s eye, Israel is all too easily deceived into thinking that in first Egypt and then Assyria lies her help. But the people’s fluttering from one to the other is lack of sense, for their real crisis is not caused by the great powers. Appealing to them is like sending for a physician who cannot heal (**5.13**). Once again Hosea terms the failure to recognize dependence on Yahweh as a basic stupidity (**5.11, 13**).

Biblehub: **So Ephraim has become like a silly, senseless dove** -- Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel, is often used in the prophetic books to symbolize the entire nation. The imagery of a "*silly, senseless dove*" suggests a lack of wisdom and discernment. Doves are known for their simplicity and vulnerability, which in this context, implies that Ephraim is acting foolishly and without understanding. This behavior reflects Israel's spiritual adultery and lack of faithfulness to God, as they seek alliances with foreign nations instead of relying on the Lord. The dove's senselessness can be seen as a metaphor for Israel's failure to heed the warnings of the prophets and their inability to recognize the consequences of their actions.

2. (:12) Certainty of Divine Chastisement

*“When they go, I will spread My net over them;
I will bring them down like the birds of the sky.
I will chastise them in accordance with the proclamation to their
assembly.”*

H. D. Beeby: This part of the poem (**7:8–12**) ends with two verses (**11 and 12**) that obviously belong together because the first likens Ephraim to a bird and the second depicts God as the fowler. **Verse 11** is very similar to **v. 8**. They both speak of two subjects: Ephraim’s identification with the nations and the nation’s moronic nature. Ephraim is like a dove, but this is not intended as a compliment. A dove flies hither and thither, uncertain and indecisive. What is more, it is “heartless,” which in this context is

equivalent to “brainless” and says nothing about lack of compassion or sympathy. The immediate reasons for being so castigated are Ephraim’s reliance upon the great powers and then not being able to make up their mind which of these powers offered the best insurance against destruction. **Verse 12** continues to show us the situation from God’s point of view. From Ephraim’s standpoint, of course, things are very different. They undoubtedly see themselves as dealing with the real world uncomplicated by the mysterious but irrelevant world of the preachers. As they see it, they are making a reasonable assessment of the evidence and are deciding responsibly for the greater benefit of the nation. The reality is very different. They are infantile, blind, ignorant, and hopeless. Ephraim’s leaders are not courageous statesmen but panicking birds about to be netted by the God they thought they had made redundant. As always the fundamental problem is the theological one. How is life in this world seen? If God is otiose or pensionable, or even absent, then the great factors in our immediate environment—the factors that demand immediate and constant attention, the factors round which all else must revolve—are of course the Egyptians and the Assyrians, the great powers of our day too. But if God is who and what he and Hosea say he is, then the Egyptians and Assyrians are pawns in a chess game that is invisible to all but those who listen to Hosea and the few with him who prophesy. If God is known, then Egypt and Assyria are opportunities for obedience or disobedience within an immeasurably greater reality. If they and the other nations and their ambitions, plots, and fears are thought to be the reality, then such a “theology” can only land one trapped and pinioned in God’s net.

Trent Butler: The assembly would be a gathering of Israelite political leaders seeing how best to court Assyria and Egypt. The report would be either the prophetic message from God announcing his discipline on them or a report from the battlefield showing how Assyria or Egypt had attacked and conquered. By whatever means, God would use the occasion to punish his silly, easily deceived, party-happy people.

Biblehub: **As they go, I will spread My net over them** -- This phrase suggests God's omnipresence and His ability to execute judgment. The imagery of a net is often used in the Bible to symbolize entrapment or capture (**Ezekiel 12:13, Job 19:6**). In the context of Hosea, it reflects God's response to Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatry. The net signifies God's inescapable judgment, emphasizing that no matter where the Israelites go, they cannot evade His reach. This also connects to the broader biblical theme of divine justice and accountability.

I will chastise them when I hear them flocking together -- Chastisement here refers to corrective discipline, a recurring theme in the Bible where God disciplines those He loves (**Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:6**). The act of flocking together implies a collective rebellion or conspiracy against God, reminiscent of the Tower of Babel (**Genesis 11:4-9**). This phrase underscores the communal aspect of Israel's sin and God's response to it. The gathering of the people in rebellion is met with divine intervention, highlighting God's attentiveness to the actions and intentions of His people.

IV. (:13-16) FAILURE TO RETURN TO THE LORD SPARKS DIVINE LAMENT

A. (:13a) Rebellion Seals One's Destiny

"Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me!

Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me!"

Trent Butler: One word from God's mouth sets the tone for this entire section: **woe**. This interjection expresses dismay, often about impending disaster (**Hos. 9:12**). God is dismayed and hurt at what he sees as he views his people Israel. They have strayed from me ... *they have rebelled against me*. God had done all he would do. His heart was right toward his people: *I long to redeem them*. But redemption calls for a people to turn back to God in repentance, to renew their knowledge of and relationship with God. Instead of returning to the Lord, they have strayed farther and farther away. The verb carries with it an undertone of fleeing or escaping, so that Israel wandered off from God intentionally, seeking to escape or flee from his presence.

James Mays: A woe-saying is spoken over those who are doomed or dead. It is not an invocation of disaster, but rather a statement of sorrow and warning that the consequences of some act or situation are impending and inevitable. In prophetic speech it becomes a dirge for those under the sentence of Yahweh's judgment. The 'woe' is provoked by the 'devastation' which Yahweh has decreed against his people who have fled from him to another, and so rebelled against his lordship.

B. (:13b-16a) Redemption Impossible As Long As:

1. (:13b) They Speak Ungodly Lies

"I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me."

Trent Butler: They pledge covenant faithfulness in worship but break every commandment and every covenant expectation once they leave God's worship place.

Robin Routledge: However, despite the people's sin, Yahweh wants to redeem them (**7:13**). Here we see a further expression of the divine husband's willingness to restore his unfaithful wife. There is a way back (cf. **7:10, 14**), but then, as now, many who are caught up in persistent wrongdoing refuse to admit their need and turn to Yahweh with the kind of meaningful repentance that can open the way for forgiveness and restoration.

2. (:14a) They Fail to Truly Seek God

*"And they do not cry to Me from their heart
When they wail on their beds;"*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The howling and self-lacerations of **v.14** probably allude to non-Yahwistic rituals that try to secure sustenance (cf. **2:5, 8**), practices forbidden in **Deuteronomy 14:1** and reviled in **1 Kings 18:28**.

James Mays: The Assyrian campaign in 734/3 undoubtedly left the land stripped of its crops and the renewal of harvest became a desperate matter (8.7). In their plight the Israelites raised the lament for help (*zā'aq*) to Yahweh (8.2). But the ritual by which they appealed was taken from the fertility rites of Canaan and dealt with Yahweh as though he were Baal. '*With their heart*' is not a phrase of earnestness or sincerity; heart in Hosea is the mind, the responsible intelligence (4.4; 7.11). Israel cried out to Yahweh in stupidity, forgetting the conditions of the covenant and trying to manipulate him as a nature god whose amoral function is to produce corn and new wine (2.5, 8f.). There is some evidence that ritual wailing was performed in prostration (II Sam. 12.16; Ps. 4.4) and was practised in fertility rites (S. of S. 3.1; Isa. 57.8). The prophets of Baal in the contest on Mount Carmel lacerated themselves as they entreated Baal to come as the god of the thunder-storm and so end the drought (I Kings 18.28); ritual gashing in mourning for the dead was prohibited in Israel because of its Canaanite connections (Deut. 14.1; Lev. 19.28). The Israelite thought of Yahweh as absent (dead?) like Baal and tried by the laments that summoned Baal to gain his help with crops. So their very appeal was stubborn contumacious rebellion against the person of Yahweh.

Biblehub: **They do not cry out to Me from their hearts** -- This phrase highlights the insincerity of Israel's repentance. The people of Israel were engaging in religious rituals and outward expressions of distress, but their hearts were not truly seeking God. This reflects a common biblical theme where God desires genuine repentance and heartfelt devotion rather than mere external compliance (Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8). The heart, in biblical terms, is the center of one's being, encompassing emotions, will, and intellect. God seeks a relationship that is authentic and rooted in love and obedience.

when they wail upon their beds -- The imagery of wailing upon their beds suggests a private, personal anguish, possibly due to the consequences of their sins or the hardships they were facing. In ancient Near Eastern culture, beds were often places of reflection and lamentation. This phrase indicates that even in their most vulnerable moments, the Israelites were not turning to God with genuine repentance. Instead, their cries were more about their suffering than a true desire to return to God. This can be contrasted with the psalms, where David often cried out to God from his bed in genuine repentance and trust (Psalm 6:6).

3. (:14b) They Put a Priority on Material Prosperity

"For the sake of grain and new wine they assemble themselves,"

Trent Butler: The more traditional interpretation is to "*gather themselves*" or "*assemble themselves*," while recent study has led some interpreters to suggest "*debauch or fornicate themselves*." The Greek Septuagint and a number of Hebrew manuscripts read "*they slash themselves*." Whatever the original meaning, the reference is again to types of Baal worship involved in seeking fertility for the fields and vineyards. In turning to such worship, **the people were turning from God.**

Biblehub: **They slash themselves for grain and new wine** -- This phrase refers to pagan practices that the Israelites had adopted, such as self-mutilation, which was

common in Canaanite religious rituals to invoke the favor of their gods ([1 Kings 18:28](#)). The Israelites were seeking material prosperity and sustenance through these idolatrous practices rather than relying on the Lord. Grain and new wine symbolize the basic provisions and blessings that God promised to His people if they remained faithful ([Deuteronomy 11:13-14](#)). Their actions reveal a misplaced trust in false gods and a departure from the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

4. (:14c) They Continually Turn Away

“They turn away from Me.”

5. (:15) They Pervert My Nurturing into Attacks

*“Although I trained and strengthened their arms,
Yet they devise evil against Me.”*

Trent Butler: Israel's relationship with God has come to much more than simply forgetting and wandering away. It is outright rebellion and evil plotting to defeat God and win victory for Baal.

James Mays: Again the action of Yahweh in his salvation-history is set over against the practice of Israel's religion. In Israel's past the power to cope with the threats and problems of national life had come from Yahweh (**11.1–4; 13.4f.**). The people's strength had been his action. But now in their time of greatest danger they seek strength through alliances with Egypt and Assyria, and so disdain the revelation of Yahweh in their normative history. Every treaty with another power is a plot against their sovereign Lord. To Yahweh's good that sought their salvation, they return the evil of seeking their own desires in their own way. The contradiction lays bare the fundamental sin of Israel – the rupture of the relation between the persons of God and people, the loss of the knowledge of God.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The indictment against Israel closes with a few broken lines that fall on the page like tears for one with a broken heart (**vv. 15-16**). No matter how hard the Lord tried to train (literally, “discipline”) and strengthen Israel for her battle against wickedness, she rejected Him by joining the side of evil. She had become “*like a deceitful bow*,” failing the archer in the time of battle. Without the Lord, who was her strength (**Psalms 28:7**), Israel would fall helplessly prostrate at the feet of her captors.

6. (:16a) They Persist in Idolatry

“They turn, but not upward,”

Trent Butler: The people of Israel return, but they do not repent. They turn, but not in the right direction. They return to their false worship and arrogant actions. They return upward to the high places rather than upward to the Most High.

James Mays: The tribulations of Israel were a divine call to return to Yahweh (**5.15; 7.7, 10**), but instead they turn to things that are of no help.

7. (:16b) They Cannot Be Counted as Dependable
“They are like a deceitful bow;”

J. Andrew Dearman: The imagery assumes that when an arrow is mounted and drawn and the bowstring then released, a bow, typically the result of careful crafting, should be able to send the arrow forward. A faulty bow can lose its tensile spring and go slack, or it can twist and snap and injure the archer. Like a modern firearm that misfires, this bow does not complete the task for which it was made. Correspondingly, Israel’s efforts will misfire and be injurious because it has pursued that which does not profit.

Duane Garrett: The **slack bow** is metaphorical for the lack of diligence and hence the military uselessness of the Israelite leadership. The **sword** more literally speaks of defeat and death in warfare. The point is that Israel's political leadership was apostate, ineffective, and doomed.

C. (:16b) Reproach and Destruction Will Be Their Destiny
*“Their princes will fall by the sword
Because of the insolence of their tongue.
This will be their derision in the land of Egypt.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: The mixing of Israel among the nations would lead to defeat (falling to the sword) and derision for Israel in Egypt, once the land of its enslavement and also the place where YHWH previously declared himself Israel’s God (**12:9** [MT 10]; **13:4**).

Biblehub: **For the cursing of their tongue** -- The leaders' downfall is attributed to their deceitful and blasphemous speech. The tongue is a powerful instrument, capable of both blessing and cursing (**James 3:6-10**). In the context of Hosea, the leaders' words likely involved false promises and alliances, as well as idolatrous practices. This reflects the broader biblical theme of accountability for one's words (**Proverbs 18:21**).

James Mays: The captains have been the architects of the royal assassinations in the search for an alignment of security. Their death will bring derision from the Egyptians whose help they alternately sought and spurned.

David Allan Hubbard: The death (*shall fall*) of the princes at the sword-point serves as a complement to their destructive role in the collapse of the monarchy (**7:3-7**). What they let happen to their kings – *all their kings have fallen* – will happen to them, not necessarily in palace intrigue but in open warfare, when the nation they have courted will strike them down, thanks to the *insolence* with which their *tongue* greeted God’s prophetic call upon their lives (**5:10, 12-14; 6:5; 9:8**). **Egypt** (cf. v. 11), watching Ephraim’s pro-Assyria policy reduced to shambles, will have the last laugh (*derision*; cf. **Ezek. 23:32; 34:7; 36:4**) at political opportunists. For Hosea, who treasured the rich grace manifested in the exodus (**13:4-5**) and who longed for Israel’s new answer which would signal a new exodus (**2:14-15**), letting the last word of this substantial section (**5:8 – 7:16**) go to Egypt must have been painful indeed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What signs do we see of moral disintegration in our society today and to what extent are our religious and political leaders complicit?
- 2) Why did Israel reject God's call for them to be separate from foreign world powers like Egypt and Assyria? What were the consequences of failing to maintain separation?
- 3) What lessons can you learn from this passage about handling political intrigue in your workplace?
- 4) How do pride and arrogance prevent people from seeing the seriousness of their predicament?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Lloyd Ogilvie: Hosea's prophecy makes use of pithy epigrams to describe Ephraim's spiritual, moral, and political condition. We have encountered two of them thus far: She is like a stubborn calf and like a morning cloud or fog. **Hosea 7:4–16** contains four more:

- The nation is like an overheated oven,
- like a cake unturned,
- like a silly dove without sense,
- and like a faulty bow.

These have to do with both domestic and international political problems dealt with in this section. And yet, they are all epigrams of the exacerbation of Ephraim's essential spiritual problem of **refusing to turn to Yahweh** and receive knowledge of Him. We cannot imagine that things got worse, but they did.

H. D. Beeby: The life of the nation is a theological matter first and foremost. In **ch. 7** all the major departments of Israel's life are touched upon and condemned or threatened:

- public morality and social affairs in **v. 1**;
- the court and political matters generally in **vv. 3–7**;
- national pride, intelligence, fortitude, and international affairs in **vv. 8–12**;
- religious observance, military matters, the country's future, security, and survival, not to mention its honor in **vv. 13–16**.

All are judged and found wanting, and the want is theological in nature. Their "God-talk" is all wrong and inevitably everything else goes wrong as a result. The real king, God, is dethroned, and the would-be "kings" scramble to take his seat:

- the earthly kings and kingmakers;
- nature and the gods of nature;

- food and drink;
- political ideology and political passion;
- the nation and its existence.

Each one of them makes a bid to sit “high and lifted up” and claim the right to be called the holy one of Israel. Each one would become the absolute, the final arbiter owing no wider allegiance and becoming determinative of all other allegiances. The effect is a chaos that can only deserve destruction. There is only one possibility for Israel (and ultimately for any other country or culture) that God is still enthroned. If the living God is not on the throne, that throne is never empty; it is always occupied. And once installed upon it, even the best of creatures becomes the abomination of desolation when it apes the Creator. Ultimate loyalty must necessarily be extended to something or somebody. The so-called atheist is a verbal creation and nothing more. Something will always claim, and successfully claim, the right to make other loyalties secondary; but only one can do this without disaster ensuing, and that is God. Israel moves to disaster because their relativities had become absolutes and the true Absolute had been judged and supposedly found wanting.

Gary Smith: This section describes the **sins of Israel**. It is an ugly picture of rejection, violence, deceit, betrayal, robbery, and arrogance. These sins are primarily the work of the priests (6:7–10) and political leaders (7:3–13). In both cases these leaders have rejected God’s standards of morality that govern the behavior of covenant partners. Both groups take control of their situation and enforce their will through violence. No one seems concerned about what God wants; in fact, Hosea observes a purposeful rejection of God’s ways. Although the principles in this passage specifically apply to spiritual and political leaders, in the broader perspective God’s condemnation of these sins relates to anyone who acts as these wicked Israelites do. . .

Not calling on God (**Hos. 7:7, 14**) or not turning to him is the ultimate snub of defiance (**7:10, 14, 16**). These people act as if God does not exist. Whenever people ignore him, they assume that he has no power or sovereignty over this world. In other words, they deny his divinity by their actions. They do what they wish, somehow thinking that God does not know and does not see what they are doing (**7:2**). By this perverse conception of God they recreate a divine being that fits their own perspective on things. They present sacrifices to their made-up god, but they are turning away from the real God when they worship. Such behavior attempts to put humanity as the creator of reality and demotes God into an inferior human construction of reality.

Although God wants to restore his people and bless them, this is impossible if they continually reject him and refuse to maintain their covenant relationship with him (**6:11 – 7:1**). Sin prevents God from pouring out his blessings and eliminates the possibility of healing. The negative themes of death, falling by the sword, destruction, and ridicule are the rewards of sin. It is a terrible thing to fall from God’s grace and suffer the wrath of his punishment.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The effect that the breakdown in religious and moral standards had on the political structure of the land is delineated in **verses 3-7**. Rather than rising

above the tumult of wickedness, the king and his princes (military advisers) were willing participants in the thrill of “doing their own thing.” In **verse 4**, Hosea compares the release of all moral restraints to the heating up of leavened bread in the oven. The fuel for that heat is labeled as **wine** (Hebrew, *yayin*), the agent already blamed for taking away the understanding of the people (cf. **4:11**). When that wine has heated up its imbiber to the point of a frenzied climax, it results in the consuming (through assassination) of the rulers (**vv. 5-6**).

David Thompson: God lists at least six reasons why He would bring “**woe**” judgments against His own people:

(Reason #1) - You have strayed from Me. (**7:13a**)

(Reason #2) - You have rebelled against Me. (**7:13b**)

(Reason #3) - You speak lies against Me. (**7:13c**)

When people are not right with God, they invent their own view of God that isn’t even true. God loves us just the way we are. We are right with God. God celebrates your immoral behavior. These are lies.

(Reason #4) - You do not cry to Me from your hearts . (**7:14a**)

(Reason #5) - You turn away from Me. (**7:14b**)

(Reason #6) - You devise evil against Me. (**7:15b**)

TEXT: Hosea 8:1-14

TITLE: A NATION THAT HAS FORGOTTEN ITS GOD –
SOW THE WIND AND REAP A WHIRLWIND

BIG IDEA:

**DANGEROUS SELF-RELIANCE FUELS COVENANT TRANSGRESSION
FOR A NATION THAT HAS FORGOTTEN ITS GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Robin Routledge: While there is general agreement that **8:1** marks the beginning of a new section, some view **8:1–14** and **9:1–9** as separate units (**Wolff** 1974; **Macintosh** 1997; **Ben Zvi** 2005: 185; **Moon** 2018). There are, though, common elements (**Hubbard** 1989: 143; cf. **Ben Zvi** 2005: 164). As well as having similar themes, both include Hosea's only references to the *house of the Lord* (**8:1**; **9:4**; cf. **9:8**); using near-identical language, both deliver the same verdict: *he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins* (**8:13**; **9:9**); and both view punishment as a *return to Egypt* (**8:13**; **9:3**). It seems reasonable, therefore, to take them as two parts of a single section.

Allan Redpath: Do we understand what it means to **forget God**? I'm not sure we do. It does not mean that God was put into the realm of oblivion. You cannot forget God like that! Even in denying God you are remembering Him. Intellectually we do not forget God. The word "*forgot*" here means, '*Israel hath mislaid his Maker*.' If you forget something, it is out of your memory altogether. If you mislay something, you are completely aware of its existence; but as far as you are concerned, it is out of use, out of circulation.

Biblehub: **Israel Will Reap the Whirlwind -- Hosea 8** serves as a somber reminder that forsaking God and His laws to seek our own ways or depend on human wisdom leads to spiritual decline and divine judgement. Even in the face of dire consequences, God's call for repentance prevails, urging us to return to Him, offering a beacon of hope amidst the gloom. . .

Hosea 8 is a dramatic call to repentance and a stark warning to the nation of Israel. As the Prophet Hosea blows a metaphorical trumpet, signifying impending judgement, he forewarns of divine retribution for Israel's rebellious and idolatrous practices. Throughout the chapter, Hosea provides vivid illustrations of Israel's abandonment of God's laws, turning to false gods, self-reliance, and misguided alliances.

Derek Kidner: If there is one theme that unifies the diversity of this chapter, it is that of **Israel's dangerous self-reliance**, with its self-appointed kings, its man-made calf, its expensive allies, its own version of religion, and its impressive fortresses. What God makes of all this, and what kind of test it could survive, these people have not troubled to ask themselves.

Allen Guenther: The oven full of sins ignites and bursts into a firestorm of judgment. Israel will experience these in two forms: withdrawal of fertility, and the horrors of war culminating in national exile. The accusation oracles establish the theme that Israel seems incapable of discerning the reasons for God's history of judgments. They have lost the covenant perspective from which to view their world. Cult has been severed from morality. Consequently, Israel is no longer able to connect God's corrective and disciplinary acts with the underlying sins. The nation has forgotten how to return to their Lord. As a result they begin to despair of pleasing God.

Hosea addresses that despair by continuing to spell out the principal reasons for the deluge of judgments: they install their own kings, rely on covenants with other nations, reject the corrective prophetic message, pervert worship, and practice the fertility cult.

Duane Garrett: The opening text alternately complains on the one hand over how Israel has sought artificial political protection and lives in a world of artificial piety, and on the other hand it asserts that the result will be military disaster and famine conditions. The text is structured in the following fashion:

- A The Coming Conquest (8:1a)
 - B Artificial Piety: Vain Reliance on the Covenant (8:1b–3)
 - C Artificial Political Protection: Choosing Their Own Kings (8:4a)
 - B' Artificial Piety: The Calf-idol (8:4b–6)
- A' The Coming Deprivation (8:7)
 - C' Artificial Political Protection: Seeking Foreign Help (8:8–10)
 - B'' Artificial Piety: Unintended Results of Worship (8:11–13)
 - C'' Artificial Political Protection: Fortresses (8:14)

This structure presents a picture of an Israel that, in its religion, had a presumptive confidence in the covenant and repeated the sin of the golden calf and whose worship had results that were the opposite of what they supposed. In the political realm they chose their own leaders rather than seek Yahweh's direction, they sought help from other nations rather than from God, and they relied on their walls and military power to defend them.

I. (:1-6) FAILED COVENANT FIDELITY

A. (:1-3) Rejection of God's Goodness and of God's Covenant – Replaced by Ignorance, Rebellion and Defeat

1. (:1) Declaration of Coming Judgment

“Put the trumpet to your lips!

Like an eagle the enemy comes against the house of the LORD,

Because they have transgressed My covenant,

And rebelled against My law.”

H. Ronald Vandermeij: In the eighth chapter, Hosea launches immediately into an announcement of the judgment that is to befall the nation. A trumpet (cf. 5:8) is again

sounded to warn the nation that the judgment is about to commence. Assyria, pictured as a swift eagle (**Deut. 28:49**), has been designated as God's tool to render justice for the transgressing of the covenant. Historically, this prediction of judgment was fulfilled both in the invasion of Tiglath-pileser III (734-733 B.C.), and in the conquest of Shalmaneser in 722 B.C. (**2 Kings 15:29; 17:1-6**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: Israel transgressed Yahweh's covenant (**1 Kin. 19:10, 14**) and rebelled against His Law. In the covenant Yahweh elected Israel to be His people and chose to be their God. The Law was given as a gracious gift to guide the people in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. His absolute authority over His people was established and maintained by both the covenant and the Law. For God's people to transgress the covenant was to step over the demarcation line drawn by the call for ultimate obedience to Yahweh and give that obedience to another god. The Israelites' rebellion (*peša'*) against the Law was faithlessness to all Yahweh had disclosed about His will for His people. The Torah was more than instruction by the priests, it represented Yahweh's written commandments, promises, and statutes. To go against them was to rebel against Yahweh Himself.

J. Andrew Dearman: Judgment is announced on YHWH's household through a beautifully structured parallel charge of violating covenant (*'ābar b'ērît*) and transgressing instruction (*pāša' tōrâ*). The vocabulary can be found elsewhere in Hosea (**6:7**, “*violate covenant*”; **4:6** and **8:12**, “*instruction*”; **7:13**, “*rebelled against me*”; **14:9**, “*transgressors*”).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This section begins with an exclamation to sound the trumpet (**v.1**). Perhaps the prophet is envisioned as the watchman of the nation (cf. **5:8; 9:8**), who is to announce the impending judgment. God's instrument of chastisement will come like a bird of prey, swiftly and mercilessly (**Dt 28:49; Jer 4:13; Hab 1:8**).

H. D. Beeby: God's response of sending the vulture-enemy was then not vengeance or hatred or peevishness; his action was demanded by the covenant in that it called for both blessing and curse (**Deut. 27–28**). To spurn God was to close the only possible door to blessing and to opt for the curse.

Jeremy Thomas: at the end of the verse by the way, the mention of foreign tongues associated with foreign invaders, is one of the main ideas of tongues in **Acts 2** Pentecost. The nation Israel just committed an atrocity; they just crucified their own Messiah. What do you think was coming next? The tongues wasn't some great blessing like our Charismatic friends wish for. **Tongues were a sign of foreign invasion.** The Holy Spirit had just invaded and they weren't ready for him at all. 37 years later what foreign army did the Lord bring against Israel in AD70 and send into exile? Rome. Titus led the Roman army and they tore Jerusalem to shreds, destroyed the Temple. What's the point of tongues after that? There is no lasting purpose. **It was a sign gift. A sign to the nation Israel that they better get with it spiritually or that was it, they were going to get creamed.** And they didn't listen and so they got creamed. So what's God warning of here in Hosea. The exact same thing. Get with the program Israel or

you're going to get a big spanking, My nation Assyria is going to cream you and you're going to go into Exile

2. (:2) Deception of False Security

"They cry out to Me, 'My God, we of Israel know Thee!'"

James Mays: They call him 'my God', an appellation which lays hold on the election and claims its blessing in trust (2.23; Pss. 18.2; 22.1; 63.1, etc.). In the confessional sentence, 'We know you', the worshippers take up a primary motif of Hosea's prophetic speech, perhaps in response to his sayings (cf. commentary on 'knowledge of God' in 4.1), and claim to express in their lives the revelation of Yahweh. They break the covenant and say 'my God', rebel against the *tōrā* and say, 'We know you'!

John Goldingay: Prayer doesn't work and sacrificial giving doesn't please God unless they are associated with acknowledging God in life as well as in words and giving.

3. (:3) Doomed to Defeat for Rejecting the Good

*"Israel has rejected the good;
The enemy will pursue him."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The good (Hebrew, *tob*) is a reference not only to God's character (Amos 5:14; Mic. 6:8); but also to the manifestation of His goodness in covenant blessings (2:8; 3:5). As proof that Israel has rejected the good, Hosea devotes the remainder of the chapter to the enumeration of specific examples of Israel's folly.

J. Andrew Dearman: Two basic charges are leveled throughout the book that illustrate rejecting good: the embrace of idolatry and polytheism on the one hand, and involvement with international suitors on the other hand.

Robin Routledge: The unnamed enemy is probably Assyria.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The word *good* is a comprehensive word that includes knowledge of God, the gifts of the covenant, the commandments, the promises of God's provision and protection, and a future filled with hope. Israel has made a choice. She rejected not only the good, but the Good One (as some translators render it) and consequently received the enemy in judgment for her obstinate stubbornness.

B. (:4a) Rejection of God's Sovereignty – Replaced by Autonomy

*"They have set up kings, but not by Me;
They have appointed princes, but I did not know it."*

Robin Routledge: The appointment of kings is motivated by ruthless ambition, not divine call.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The crucial problem was that Israel no longer sought the guidance of God. This was a decisive step away from Him in the downward spiral of forgetting

Him. He was no longer the source of wisdom for large or small decisions, but shelved as an anachronism. . .

The opposite of forgetting God is to receive His sovereign control and guidance in every moment, choice, and decision. He will accept no vice-regency in our lives. Nor will He serve as our advisor while we reign on the throne of our little kingdom.

James Mays: The rejection is not of kingship per se, but of its development as a focus of power independent of Yahweh. For that reason, judgment will create an interlude when Israel lives without king and official (**3.4; 7.10b**).

J. Andrew Dearman: The making of kings was a sacral act in the ancient world; it thus **required divine approval**. Thus prophets and priests must proclaim the investiture as divinely willed, and the designated king would be anointed and invested in his office. Hosea offers his prophetic perspective that the kings (and related officials) have not been YHWH's designees, whatever the official steps undertaken in Israel.

Derek Kidner: Although the king-making castigated here was far from democratic in our sense – being a series of conspiracies and bloody coups – God saw it as the people's doing for all that; for the violence at the top had its roots in the anarchy below. We could have guessed as much, but **chapter 4:1-3** has already put it beyond doubt.

Allen Guenther: Though Israel claims to *know* their God (**Hos. 8:2**), they appoint over themselves rulers whom the Lord does not know. It is not that Israel is being ruled by foreigners. Rather, they are governed by kings who do not walk according to God's decrees nor submit to his instruction (cf. **Deut. 17:14-20**). Israel has substituted rulers of their own choice for rulers God might choose.

John Goldingay: The people of God are inclined to think that the solution to their problems is organizational or structural or administrative or political. Although God expects to decide who leads his people, they are inclined to make their own appointments, even if they are also going through the motions of seeking to know his will. The "officials" would include members of a king's staff such as senior priests, secretaries of state, recorder, commander in chief, palace administrator, and overseers of the governors and of the conscript labor force (**1 Kings 4:1-7**).

David Thompson: **S. Lewis Johnson** once said one of the things that greatly troubled him is that many people in the church want their leader to make them be like all the other churches. He said most of the time that will bring people into the "reproach of God." So rather than pray for God to send them His choice, they appoint their leaders who will make them like all the other churches. They get the resumes and they appoint some "rah rah" leader who will be good with youth, who will bring in progressive music, who will head lots of programs. The problem is these men are not called or gifted by God to feed people the Word of God. Very few churches actually look for someone who will study to rightly divide Scripture, who will give attention to

systematic reading of the Word of God and the teaching of the Scriptures. Instead, they appoint their own leaders because they really don't care about the Word of God.

C. (:4b-6) Rejection of Genuine Worship of God – Replaced by Idolatry

1. Foolishness of Devoting Silver and Gold to the Making of Idols

*“With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves,
That they might be cut off.”*

Gary Smith: Verses 4–6 describe Israel's rebellion against God in the area of politics and worship. Referring back to his earlier discussion in 7:3–7, Hosea reminds his audience that they have removed one king and appointed another without asking God for direction or identifying his chosen leader (see **2 Kings 15**). They have rejected God's sovereign control and “approval” of key decisions and have taken over his role of directing the nation.

2. (:5) Fury of Divine Wrath Directed against Idolatry

a. Wrath Due to Idolatry

*“He has rejected your calf, O Samaria,
saying, ‘My anger burns against them!’”*

Gary Smith: The people have also made idols of gold and silver, particularly the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (**Hos. 8:5–6**; see **1 Kings 12**). God's “*anger burns against them*” (**8:5**) because these bull images were quickly confused with the Canaanite god Baal, thus syncretizing perverse pagan ideas with the pure revelation of God revealed in the Torah. God laments the impurity this has brought to the nation and yearns for the day when they will reject idols (**8:5b**). This hunk of metal in the form of a bull is just a man-made piece of art, not a divine being with almighty power. It is not the God of Israel. Therefore, God rejects this calf and will have it cut to pieces (**8:4b, 6b**).

David Allan Hubbard: The spurning is God's response to Samaria's spurning of his covenant (**v. 3**) and the transferring of their loyalty from Yahweh to the calf that symbolized for them the fertility of Baal. These Samaritans, who are the subjects of the verbs in **verse 4**, must be the *them* against whom God's anger burned (cf. **Isa. 5:25** for this wrath, which in Isaiah is coupled with God's outstretched hand, ready to smite in judgment; cf. **9:12, 17, 21; 10:4**). That burning wrath, not forgiving love, is Yahweh's disposition here is due both to the lack of Israel's penitence and to the intensity of their sin. The honour of the jealous God has been crudely compromised in the calf-cult (cf. **Exod. 32:10, 11, 19** where Yahweh and Moses both burn with anger at the sight of the golden calf), and his entire countenance (anger and ‘nose’ are the same Heb. word, ‘*ap*’) has been set aflame with a righteous blaze that only Israel's full return will quench (**11:9; 14:4**).

Trent Butler: The entire history of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had been marked by worship of calves that the first king, Jeroboam I, had set up about 930 B.C. (**1 Kgs. 12:28–33**). God never accepted those calves as true representations of his worship.

Indeed, the calves incited Israel to worship the bull that represented Baal in the Canaanite worship system.

b. Guilt Persists without Repentance

“How long will they be incapable of innocence?”

Robin Routledge: The final part of **verse 5** expresses Yahweh’s dismay over Israel’s lack of purity. This is linked with the cleanness necessary to come before God (**Pss 26:6; 73:13**; cf. **Gen. 20:5**). Despite calls to turn back to Yahweh, the people persist in idolatrous disobedience.

J. Andrew Dearman: The prophet’s representation of divine anger in **v. 5** includes a rhetorical question. How long can Israel remain guilty? A major claim of the book is that Israel cannot remain guilty forever. Israel must repent or suffer the consequences. Moreover, the time of judgment is at hand in the historical process. That is the unspoken conclusion to the question of **8:5**.

David Allan Hubbard: *How long?* does not raise a chronological question but laments that Israel’s lack of purity (cf. **Gen. 20:5; Pss 26:6; 73:13**, where the Heb. word describes innocent hands, clean of guilt) has become a **permanent practice**.

3. (:6) Fundamental Refutation of Idolatry

*“For from Israel is even this! A craftsman made it, so it is not God;
Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.”*

James Mays: The blunt assertions of the first line of **v. 6** are scornful and abusive. How can a deity be manufactured in an artisan’s shop! This analysis of the ridiculous folly of an idol focuses on the one fact that it is the creation of a human being, which made it an impossibly futile figure to those who knew Yahweh by experience and tradition as the maker of history (**Isa. 8.2, 20; 40.18–20; 44.9ff.**). The protest that the bull is no god implies that the Israelites had come to see the image itself as divine. It was incredible to Hosea that they should have faith in what they had made and could control. Their reverence will be shown up for superstition in the fate to come upon their image. This thing carved of wood and covered with gold will be riven into splinters!

Allen Guenther: Inherent in the anti-idol argument is an implicit comparison with God’s original design. People were made in the divine image. When they rebel against their covenant Lord, they re-create him in the image of the animals they were to rule. At a deeply subconscious level, people attempt to control their gods. They are, like the first humans, intent on becoming and acting like gods.

II. (:7-10) FRUITLESS FOREIGN ALLIANCES

A. (:7) Decisions to Abandon God Reap Dire Consequences

“For they sow the wind, And they reap the whirlwind.”

*The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain.
Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up."*

Lloyd Ogilvie: The agricultural proverb establishes the irrevocable connection between present actions and future judgment. **Wolff** interprets each aspect of the proverb in this light.

"The order God has established in the world can be demonstrated to Israel's farmers by using the harvest as an example (v. 7a). The deed is the seed that sprouts up in abundance for harvest. Here, *rûah*, a **gentle breeze**, is a catchword used in Wisdom for unstable, helpless vanity (**Eccl. 1:14, 17; Prov. 11:29; Job 7:7**). Trust in cultic and political maneuvers thus leads to self-deception (cf. **12:2**). Just as surely as the calf of Samaria will be shattered. *Sûpâ* is a **destructive whirlwind** which, like the harvest, grows out of the seed of a gentle breeze. . . . With the wind and vanity of their idol worship, Israel brings upon itself a whirlwind of disaster."

On the other hand, **Andersen and Freedman** translate the proverb, "*They will sow when it is windy. They will reap in a whirlwind,*" and comment:

"The purpose of idol-making was to secure good harvests, among other benefits, and it is likely that the king himself was a sacral person in the performance of the necessary rites. A fit punishment for such contempt toward Yahweh would be the removal of the kings, destruction of the idol (v. 6), and **ruination of agriculture**. . . . The farmer is to be frustrated at each major stage of his work. Sowing in the wind, he loses much of the grain at the start. Harvesting in a gale, he loses most of the yield at the end."

Stuart underlines the futility of the fertility cult in bringing abundance.

Verse 7 contains three brief futility curses, in which expectations are thwarted before they can be realized (. . . cf. **Deut. 28:30–42**). In ancient times sowers would throw their seed with a gentle wind, which helped scatter it evenly on a tilled field; *rûah* has thus an adverbial sense, i.e., '*with a wind*' without symbolic overtones. The disaster which brings to naught the planning and effort of the sower is seen in the storm disintegrating and scattering the heads of grain before they can be harvested.

However, **Stuart** also allows that the interpretation of **Wolff** may be valid as well and that the saying is a double entendre with the sense that "what you sow you will reap many times over," with *rûah* standing for **worthlessness**. . .

To sow with the wind, then, was to sow with a false expectation of Baal's fertility. The consequences would be Yahweh's judgment in the destruction of the crop.

James Mays: The second saying is set in rhyme, a somewhat rare device in Hebrew poetry. '*Grain without growth (semah) yields no meal (qemah).*' What fails in the beginning can hardly succeed at the end. This saying applies to the same folly in Israel's life as the first. They have called on the cult for fertility and turned to allies for

security, but to no avail. Now can they expect better of such conduct in the future? Hosea nails the point down with an added prediction of judgment. Even if their present crop did yield grain, they would not harvest it, for strangers would swallow it up. The enemy sent by Yahweh (v. 3) guarantees the truth of the Wisdom principle!

Jeremy Thomas: Now which pattern or patterns of suffering are going on in **verse 7**? *Sow the wind...reap the whirlwind.* That's **cause effect**. . . Cause, people in Israel did stupid things, effect they reap the whirlwind, just as night follows day so **if you sin there are consequences**.

John Schultz: In beautiful inconsistency, the prophet theorizes that some stalks would produce grain but this will not mean that the one who sowed would be fed with it. The land would be invaded and **the invader would take away the crop**, leaving the population to starve to death. Israel had had enough of such experiences in her past. We read that, in the days of Gideon: *"Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it."*

B. (:8) Disappearance and Despising of Israel

"Israel is swallowed up;

They are now among the nations Like a vessel in which no one delights."

Robin Routledge: The nation will share the same fate as the grain, and will disappear among foreign peoples, notably Assyria. And, as a result of divine judgment, and maybe partly, too, due to its vacillating, pleading for help with one nation then another (cf. 7:11) and forming and breaking alliances, Israel has become worthless (literally, 'a vessel without value') on the international stage.

J. Andrew Dearman: Israel's political involvement has made it not stronger but weaker.

Trent Butler: Israel's land was situated between Assyria and Babylon to the northeast and Egypt to the southwest. Similarly, it stood between Asia Minor and Syria to the northwest and the trading lanes of the Arabian Desert to the southeast. All land traffic had to go through Israel, so all nations wanted to control their territory. God announced that such desire would be history. Enemies would swallow up the nation just as strangers swallowed up whatever grain might be produced. Arrogant Israel stood as a worthless, broken pot that no one wanted, and they stood on foreign soil, not their own.

C. (:9) Desperate Diplomacy

*"For they have gone up to Assyria, Like a wild donkey all alone;
Ephraim has hired lovers."*

Lloyd Ogilvie: The donkey image uses a pun on the word donkey with the name Ephraim. Instead of remaining with the herd, the wild donkey goes off to seek its mate. “*Ephraim has hired lovers.*” The image shifts. The people are like a whore who has sunk so low that she must pay her lovers and cannot even earn a whore’s wage.

J. Andrew Dearman: The Asian wild ass is not a solitary figure; it lives in herds as a sociable animal. Like the zebra, however, it does not take to domestication. Ishmael, for example, is compared to the wild ass (**Gen. 16:12**), although the mobile desert dwellers descended from him were tightly organized in clans and tribes. Perhaps the related characteristics of independence and stubbornness are the vehicle (source domain) of the metaphor to render the tenor (target domain) of a laughable and pitiful Israel overwhelmed in the diplomatic arena. Elsewhere Hosea describes the people as a stubborn heifer (**4:16**). A wild ass hiring love is a metaphor of cutting sarcasm, intended to shame Ephraim and its diplomatic frenzy. Here is a solitary wild ass (which still has plenty of opportunities to mate in its own herd) out paying for lovers! The love in this case would be the goodwill or favors offered by the Assyrian suzerain. Ephraim, however, is going to pay for them.

D. (:10) Diminishment Despite Seeking Assistance

*“Even though they hire allies among the nations,
Now I will gather them up;
And they will begin to diminish because of the burden of the king of princes.”*

Lloyd Ogilvie: The figure of gather is one of judgment, as in **Hosea 9:6, Joel 3:2, Micah 4:12–5:1, and Ezekiel 16:37 and 22:20**. Israel will be gathered like ripe fruit placed in a container, there to waste away under the rule of the Assyrian “king of princes” or mighty king.

Trent Butler: Having gathered them, God will make them decrease in number as they serve their unfaithful kings and leaders and pay the exorbitant taxes demanded so the kings can continue to pay tribute to Assyria or other nations (**2 Kgs. 15:19–20**). This gathering for decrease stands in opposition to God's act of gathering the Israelites in Egypt, where he made them multiply miraculously in spite of the burdens of the Egyptian kings.

III. (:11-14) FUTILE RELIGIOUS PURSUITS

Gary Smith: Verses 11–14 draw a logical connection between God’s condemnation of Israel for giving unacceptable sacrifices and her rejection of God’s instructions in the Torah. According to Leviticus, sacrifices were to be a sweet-smelling aroma that pleased God (**Lev. 1:9, 13, 17; 2:9, 12; 3:5, 16; 4:31**) because the people’s worship and repentance brought forgiveness of sins. But in Hosea’s time the people’s “*choice sacrifices*” (**Hos. 8:13**) on the many pagan altars around the nation have brought greater sinning instead of expiation of sin and divine pleasure (**8:11**). This is due to the nation’s

rejection of the divine instructions God gave in the laws of Moses (Hosea blamed the priests for not teaching people these laws in **4:6**).

Since the people have adopted their theological understanding of sacrifices, dietary laws, the character of the divine, and appropriate social behavior from their Canaanite culture, God's instructions in the Torah seem strange and inapplicable in their setting (**8:12**). Since God's instructions do not fit in with the times, the people have rejected his covenant stipulations. They are like a spouse who has decided not to live by the marriage covenant any longer.

These actions give God few choices. He must punish the nation for her sins. The people are only pleasing themselves, not God, when they eat these sacrifices. They forget who God is, the One who originally made them into a nation (see **Isa. 44:2; 51:13**) and who can send them back to Egypt and nullify his redemptive acts (**Hos. 8:13**). The leaders of the nation love the luxury of bigger homes and the security of stronger palaces and fortifications for themselves. But they forget that God protects cities, not walls. Therefore in the near future God will demonstrate his power and destroy these proud cities and the homes in them.

A. (:11) Repurposing of Religious Intentions

*"Since Ephraim has multiplied altars for sin,
They have become altars of sinning for him."*

Trent Butler: One thing multiplied in Israel—altars. They built altars to offer sacrifices for their sins. To all appearances such altars sought to fulfill God's demands for sin offerings (**Lev. 16:1–34**). But the unfaithful people confused offerings to the God of Israel and offerings to Baal. They confused obeying God's covenant expectations and carrying out ritual, which they thought was a guaranteed way of pleasing God. They could not learn that *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings"* (**Hos. 6:6**). Thus altars for sin offerings became altars for sinning for a people who had forgotten the meaning of obedience.

James Mays: An altar marked a holy place, a shrine where a deity was thought to be available for worship and communion; it was an instrument of commerce with the god. Building altars was a pious act. Had not the fathers done so (**Gen. 12:7; 33:20; 35:7**)? Altars meant sacrifice and sacrifice atoned for whatever sins were committed. As Israel prospered in the land, more and more altars were erected (**10.1**). Religion got its proportionate share of the nation's prosperity, probably because the cult was imagined to be the machine which produced such abundance. Ephraim had an impeccable record in the cause of sanctuary extension. Yet Yahweh sends no commendation by the prophet. His startling word is that the many altars built to deal with sin have become a place to sin. As Israel now uses them, altars come between Yahweh and his people instead of bringing them to encounter. Sacrifice has become an end in itself (**v. 13a**; see **Amos 4.4f.**) and has displaced attention to the will of their Lord (**v. 12**). The sacrificial cult was practised according to the ways of Canaan and was an occasion for depravity and evil (**4.13f.**). Just as the expansion of the priesthood meant increase of iniquity, the

multiplication of altars brought the proliferation of sin. **The cult resulted in the very opposite of its pious purpose!**

J. Andrew Dealman: There are at least two possibilities why Hosea connected the increase in altars and the increase in sinfulness, which, of course, was the opposite of Ephraim's intent in building them. One is a charge of polytheism, with Ephraim following the logic of polytheism in offering sacrifice to a number of deities in hopes of securing its well-being. Modern proverbial analogies would be "covering all the bases" or "hedging one's bets." The other possibility is a critique of perceived syncretistic and baalized forms of Yahwism that usher forth from those who do not "*know YHWH*" (8:2). If 8:13 continues the charge of inadequate cultic service to YHWH, then syncretistic, baalized forms of Yahwism are likely in mind in v. 11. The brevity of Hosea's expression makes it difficult to choose between these options for increased sacrificial activities, and it is quite possible that the broad-based charge includes examples of both.

B. (:12) Refusal to Heed Divine Instruction

*"Though I wrote for him ten thousand precepts of My law,
They are regarded as a strange thing."*

Robin Routledge: This points to the people's disregard for Yahweh's written instruction, and includes an indictment of the priests, who have failed to teach the people as they should (cf. 4:4–10; Mal. 2:6–9). Indeed, it appears that Israel's religion has become so corrupted by false worship that what is set out in the law and should be intrinsic to Israel's covenant faith is now considered '*strange*' (*zār*).

C. (:13a) Rejection of Sacrifices which Have Been Perverted into Gluttonous Feasts

*"As for My sacrificial gifts, They sacrifice the flesh and eat it,
But the LORD has taken no delight in them."*

D. (:13b) Remembrance of Sins with a View to Punishment

*"Now He will remember their iniquity, And punish them for their sins;
They will return to Egypt."*

E. (:14) Root Problem: Displaced Security

*"For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces;
And Judah has multiplied fortified cities,
But I will send a fire on its cities that it may consume its palatial dwellings."*

Surprising mention of **Judah** here.

J. Andrew Dearman: "*Judah*" has pursued its security in ways similar to Israel and will be judged similarly.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The last verse of **Hosea 8** not only summarizes the whole chapter but serves as a fulcrum for the levers of truth throughout the whole chapter. When we take verse 14 as the text for a message, we have a basic theme for the exposition of the main points throughout the chapter. “*For Israel has forgotten his Maker*” (Hos. 8:14). . .

This is the reason for the misplaced authority, the misappropriated autonomy, the misdirected adoration, and the miscalculated assumptions. In this final verse of chapter 8, both Israel and Judah are assured of the fateful loss of conscious accountability and consistent attention to their Creator, Sustainer, and absolute sovereign Lord.

Robin Routledge: It continues the theme of sin and judgment, with the indictment that the people have forgotten (*šākah*) Yahweh (cf. **2:13; 4:6; 13:6**) and engage instead in building projects, which are probably aimed at flaunting their wealth and providing security. There may be an intentional contrast between Israel forgetting Yahweh, and Yahweh remembering Israel’s sin in the previous verse.

David Allan Hubbard: Judah’s fortified cities (NIV’s ‘*towns*’ is better, given their size) speak of the false reliance on self-protection and military might (cf. **10:14; 11:6**) which Judah (and Israel) substituted for trust in God (cf. **Ps. 127:1**); Sennacherib claimed to have taken forty-six such Judean towns just three decades after Hosea spoke these words; and the means used for building such lavish enterprises were themselves unjust – unfair taxation, profit from crooked businesses, and slave labour.

Duane Garrett: Yahweh concludes his first complaint with another lamentation over Israel's desire to find security through political and military means. The nation “*forgets*” God when it supposes that it must resort to military buildup in order to provide security for itself. In this context “*palaces*” probably are not especially places of luxury but fortified residences analogous to Herod's residence at Masada. Together with fortified towns and garrisons, these were to be a security network that both protected the nation and in particular preserved the lives and wealth of the upper classes. The “*fire*” that Yahweh sends is metonymy for invasion and siege work by enemy nations, but the language recalls the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we prepared to reap what we have sown?
- 2) How was Israel deceived into a false sense of security?
- 3) What disciplines have we implemented to make sure that our worship is acceptable to God?
- 4) Where are you tempted to rely on self or secular influences instead of on God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: vv. 1-6 -- Destruction is coming because Israel has broken the covenant and rebelled against God's laws. The trumpet signals an invading army (cf. 5:8). The eagle is about the swoop on its prey. The people claim to know the Lord, but they have rejected his ways. "*The good*" (or "prosperity") results from obedience to the covenant (cf. Dt 30:15). Pursuit by enemies is a covenant curse for disobedience (e.g., Dt 28:25). The northern kingdom set up their own kings in rivalry to the house of David, without God's authorization (cf. Dt 17:15). King Jeroboam defined the idolatrous character of the northern kingdom from its outset by setting up golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1Ki 12:26-30). Dan had fallen to Assyria in Hosea's day. Samaria was the capital of Israel. Hosea's wording here in **Hosea 8:5** means either that Samaria had its own calf (not mentioned elsewhere) or that Samaria represents the northern kingdom and the calf was still at Bethel. Idolatry, forbidden in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:4-6), arouses God's anger.

vv. 7-14 – Israel's pursuit of the nations by following their idolatry and by making alliances with them (*sowing the wind*) will result in catastrophe (*reaping the whirlwind*). This is God's judgment. Israel will suffer agricultural and economic loss and be despised among the nations (vv. 7-8). In Hebrew, the word "*Ephraim*" (another name for Israel) sounds like "*wild donkey*." The image may reflect Israel's stubbornness or sexual prowess. Selling herself to lovers brings to mind the actions of Gomer in chapters 1-3. Rather than trusting the Lord, Israel has sought protection from Assyria, but the consequences of this will be dire: they will waste away under an oppressive regime. The people of Israel continue to offer sacrifices to the Lord, but because they continue in sin and reject the requirements of the national covenant, God is not pleased with them. Israel has become like the nations, and God's ways are foreign to the people. While God is merciful and gracious, continued rebellion will result in punishment and a reversal of God's great exodus salvation. The Israelites have forgotten their Maker (instead they make idols; see 8:6). Judah is also caught up in seeking false security in fortifications, but God will destroy these cities through warfare. And history shows that is what happened. Israel was invaded by the Assyrians in 722 BC and Judah by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

James Mays: Chapter 8 opens a new sequence of oracles. The initial summons to sound the alarm (v. 1) recalls the beginning of the sequence concerning the Syrian-Ephraimite war in 5.8 – 6.6. Here too a foe is at hand and the danger clearly comes from Assyria. The details of the situation reflected in the oracles are not sufficiently specific to establish the exact date, but clues in the text point to the years immediately after 733. The first oracle (vv. 1–3) not only sets the scene but also serves as an overtone by summarizing the sin and punishment of Israel in the briefest and yet most comprehensive fashion possible. The rest of the chapter is a tightly knit sequence of sayings arranged to spell out the correctness of the indictment with one example after

another. **Verse 4** is a reproach against man-made governments and gods. **Verses 5f.** denounce a specific case of the latter, the bull of Samaria.

John Goldingay: The relationship between God and his people is **covenantal**. It is one in which God's grace takes the initiative in setting up a covenant relationship or pact; but on the basis of what he has done for his people, he then expects them to live by his instruction. God's grace toward his people was not conditioned (it was grace), but God lays down conditions on the basis of which a particular generation or congregation continues to be his people. What God then promises his people on the basis of their living by his instruction is good (e.g., **Rom. 8:28**). Yet the people of God have a bewildering unwillingness to face the facts about themselves and turn from guilt to freedom (e.g., **1 Cor. 10:1–11**).

The dealings God has with his people are thus based both on a personal but hierarchical relationship and on set and hard-and-fast instructions. What is right is right because God says so and because it conforms to something objective about reality. Thus the waywardness of the people of God lies both in rebellion against the relationship with the one who gives the instructions (e.g., **Isa. 30:1**) and in transgression of the instructions, which are themselves right (e.g., **1 John 3:4**). And the charge that his people have transgressed his pact and rebelled against his instruction is then “the heart of YHWH's controversy with Israel.”

The pact involves trusting in God and looking to the resources he has given his people. Transgression and rebellion thus lie (among other things) in looking to resources outside the people of God rather than trusting in God. The people of God are challenged to remember that God is not merely the world's maker but their maker as well and therefore the one they can and must trust. But the people of God are inclined to use the things they have, which may be God's gifts, to make idols and also to forget that the things they have made are humanly made. God is then inclined to get angry with them and reject and destroy the things they construct. So transgression and rebellion are inclined to involve compromise, loss, discrediting, and sorrow. What you sow, you reap (e.g., **Gal. 6:7**). It's an aspect of the moral fabric of reality. Worse still, sometimes you do something stupid and something ten times as bad ricochets back on you. Maybe even worse still, sometimes God has other things to say to his people, but there's no point because we haven't taken notice of what he's already said (e.g., **Heb. 5:11–14**).

H. D. Beeby: As the title of this chapter indicates, most of the content is related to the twin themes of king and cult. A more detailed analysis produces six subsections:

1. A new king is installed without God's approval (**v. 4a**);
2. Idols are made and their worship is destructive (**v. 4b**);
3. Samaria worships the calf (or the bull): a do-it-yourself parody of the true worship, which ends in destruction (**vv. 5–6**);
4. Israel has chosen to buy security from Assyria, with the result that they have become lost among the nations;

5. A sacrificial system has evolved which is powered by lust and has therefore become an occasion for sin rather than an opportunity for forgiveness;
6. Palaces and fortified cities have multiplied, making Israel forget their Maker. . .

So far in this chapter the accusations have been of a general nature—breaking the covenant, transgressing the law, spurning the good. Now follows the **more detailed evidence**, which we have already divided into six parts.

David Thompson: GOD’S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE GUARANTEES THAT HE WILL NOT LET HIS PEOPLE GET AWAY WITH EVIL; BUT HE WILL SEND HIS SERIOUS CHASTISING JUDGMENTS IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET HIS PEOPLE TO TURN BACK TO HIM, THE GOD THEY FORGOT.

4 Perspectives of God towards the worship of His own people:

Perspective #1 - Their altars are altars of sin . **8:11**

Perspective #2 - My Word is strange to My own people. **8:12**

Perspective #3 - Their sacrifices do not delight Me but cause Me to punish them. **8:13**

Perspective #4 - Israel had forgotten her God. **8:14**

TEXT: Hosea 9:1-17

TITLE: PUNISHMENT FOR ISRAEL'S APOSTASY

BIG IDEA:

THE JUDGMENT OF DISPERSION AND BARRENNESS CHARACTERIZES A NATION ABANDONED BY GOD FOR SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY AND DEEP DEPRAVITY

INTRODUCTION:

H. D. Beeby: Hosea continues his attack on the cult. In the previous chapters the targets had been idols, altars, and sacrifices; in the present chapter he chooses the most culpable example of cultic apostasy: a **harvest festival**. Most likely this was the autumn festival of Tabernacles or Booths, also known as the “*feast of the LORD*” (v. 5; **Judg. 21:19–21; Deut. 16:13–15; Lev. 23:39–43**).

Biblehub: **Hosea 9** is a stern chapter filled with the prophetic words of divine judgment. It showcases God's profound disappointment with Israel for its repeated disobedience and idolatry. Here, the consequences of unfaithfulness are laid bare, painting a clear picture of the spiritual famine that has overtaken the land. The chapter also underscores the grave dangers of rejecting God's prophets and their teachings.

John MacArthur: Hosea enumerates the features of the Lord's banishment to Assyria:

- Loss of joy (vv. 1, 2)
- Exile (vv. 3-6)
- Loss of spiritual discernment (vv. 7-9)
- Declining birth rate (vv. 10-16)
- Abandonment by God (v. 17)

H. Ronald Vandermeij: After sowing the wind for two centuries, the nation of Israel is granted in **chapters 9-10** a glimpse of the whirlwind that will sweep her into judgment. As will be observed throughout this section, God's judgment in each case is a particular fulfillment of the sowing-reaping principle (cf. **Gal. 6:8**). Those sins that Israel sowed have become the seeds of her well-deserved judgment.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The **deception of prosperity** among the people to whom Hosea spoke would soon be exposed. The threat of losing food and wine in their threshing floors and winepresses is explained in **verse 3**. The people will not enjoy the produce of the land because they will no longer dwell there. Their salvation history will be reversed. Some of the people will be exiled in Egypt. They will be punished by being sent back to the bondage from which the people of God had escaped in the historic Exodus centuries before. Others will be carried off to exile in Assyria, where they will eat food offered to other gods. This is an ironic twist for the Israelites. They had worshiped false gods in their own land; now they would be forced to eat food that was taboo. They would have to stomach their own apostasy!

Further, because the people resisted worshiping Yahweh in their own land, they will not be able to worship Him in customary ways in the dispersion. **Verse 4** plays on the irony. Thank offerings had been misdirected to false gods in their homeland; now the wine offering, the drink offering, which should express gratitude to Yahweh, would not be permitted in captivity. Sacrifices that should have been made for sin and the assurance of atonement before, now will not be pleasing to Yahweh. The words, “*Nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him*” (**9:4**), may also be rendered, “*They shall not offer their sacrifices to Him.*” The reason will be that traditional altar sacrifices to Yahweh will not be allowed. All food in the foreign lands will be ritually unclean and unfit for offering to Yahweh. At home the Israelites had substituted physical for spiritual satisfaction. In captivity they would have only physical satisfaction.

I. (:1-9) THE JUDGMENT OF DISPERSION AND ABANDONMENT

Trent Butler: Good harvests and other immediate “blessings” do not guarantee God's favor or call for God's people to celebrate when they have not changed their false religion and sinful lifestyles.

Anthony Petterson: The Israelites’ worship will be radically altered because of their sin and God’s punishment. Festivals were occasions for rejoicing, but the people of Israel have no reason to rejoice. They suffer because of their unfaithfulness (identified in **ch. 8** as idolatry and foreign alliances). Israel was to be distinct from the nations, but the people have acted like prostitutes, selling themselves to the nations,. The wages of sin are famine, military conquest, and exile to the very countries they have flirted with (cf. **Dt 28:38-41**). Any sacrifice they offer in exile will be unacceptable to God and render the people unclean (**Hos 9:4**). They will not be able to carry out their festivals there at all (**v. 5**; cf. **2:11**). Egypt is a place of death for Israel (Memphis was renowned for its burial practices). The treasure the Israelites sought will come to ruin. All this is God’s punishment on their many sins (**9:6-7**). It is not certain from the Hebrew whether the prophet in **verses 7-8** is a true prophet that the people reject or a false prophet who deceives and will be judged by God. Either way, the people have rejected God’s word and are as corrupt as the people in the days of Gibeah, a reference to the horrific pack rape and murder of a Levite’s concubine that resulted in civil war within Israel (**Jdg 19-21**; cf. **Hos 10:9**). God’s justice will bring punishment for their sins.

David Allan Hubbard: The tone of the entire passage is **threat of judgment by an exile** (**v. 3**) which will make their religious festivities impossible (**vv. 4-5**). In the land that belongs to Yahweh (**v. 3**), their feasts have become pagan activities (cf. like the peoples, **v. 1**). Now they will be dispatched among these pagan peoples (**vv. 3, 6**), where singing Yahweh’s song will be only a tearful memory (**Ps. 137**). The threat of exile has been sounded before (**7:16; 8:13**). Here for the first time it is amplified by a disclosure of its monumental consequences for Israel’s treasured calendar of worship.

A. (:1-4) Warning against Rejoicing

Biblehub: God admonishes Israel not to rejoice like other nations, given their betrayal through idolatry. He prophesies that they will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria, indicating future exile and hardship. Their offerings will no longer be pleasing to God.

1. (:1-2) Rebuke for Spiritual Harlotry

a. (:1) Warning Not to Rejoice

*“Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!
For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.
You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor.”*

Trent Butler: The invasion by Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria in 732 B.C. had reduced Israel's power and resources to almost nothing. Still Israel ignored God and went on worshipping as usual, combining traditions from worship of God with those of Baal worship. Apparently one year, shortly after 732, Israel's harvest was abundant. The people gathered for the harvest festival. It was a time of joy, celebrating God's good gifts to his people.

In the middle of the celebration, Hosea appeared and commanded the people to stop the party. Israel's harvest festival did not look like God's instructions from Deuteronomy. Their celebration followed the pattern of Baal worship with sacred prostitution and magical expectations. Israel rejoiced like the nations, not like the Lord wanted. No longer did they celebrate at the place God chose, his holy sanctuary. Rather, they celebrated at every threshing floor.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Joy is the natural response of agricultural people at seeing the abundance of their harvests (**Lev 23:40; Dt 16:14**), but Israel will have no cause to celebrate (**v.1**).

Allen Guenther: What seems to be prohibited is that their pattern of celebration is borrowed from the Canaanite culture. Possibly the form of these celebrations was unique and associated with the Baal and Asherah cults. The accusation proper spells out the nature of their sin (**9:1b**). . .

The Israelites are caught between two worldviews. Each accounts for the harvest, but in different ways. Yahwism draws attention to God as the source of all that the earth produces (cf. **Gen. 1:11-13, 20-30**). Accepting the Lord as the source of the harvest is to be an act of faith. No magic, fertility ritual, or sexual acts are needed to stimulate or energize the Deity to produce the crops.

Baal worship invited the worshiper to participate with the god Baal in generating new life and filling the granaries. It is hard to argue with vivid experiences. For those preoccupied with the benefits of worship, Baal more convincingly explained the source of the harvest than the Lord.

Duane Garrett: Israel had tried to be like other nations by seeking wealth and good harvests by the same means that the nations employed, the fertility cult. But Israel could not become one of the nations, and the lost harvest served as evidence that, whether or not they wanted it, they were the elect of Yahweh. When Israel embraced pagan religious ideals, it was behaving in a way inconsistent with its own identity. In the same manner the church cannot do itself or anyone else any good if it tries to be what it is not. When salt loses its flavor, it becomes entirely worthless (**Matt 5:13**).

Because their harvest has failed, they cannot rejoice, and their harvest has failed because of their “prostitution” against God. Here Hosea only briefly alludes to the metaphor of the prostitute, but that allusion is sufficient for the reader to call to mind the entire image of Israel the wayward wife that Hosea has already developed. The “wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor” probably carries a double meaning. It is literally the immoral acts that often accompanied the party atmosphere at harvest, but it is also figuratively the large harvest that the fertility cult was intended to insure. The supposed benefits of the cult were both sexual license and agricultural prosperity.

- b. (:2) Withholding of Material Blessings (Grain and Wine)
*“Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them,
And the new wine will fail them.”*

Trent Butler: God controls the earth and all its produce. When they did not worship him for providing their needs, he would withhold his blessings.

Robin Routledge: The nation has been **unfaithful** (*zānā*; cf. **1:2; 2:5; 3:3; 4:10–15; 5:3**), and what they have received, rather than being a sign of divine blessing, is no more than the pay given to a prostitute (cf. **2:7, 12**). Consequently, Israel’s celebrations will be short-lived. Yahweh’s judgment will remove material signs of prosperity (cf. **2:7**), and the produce of threshing-floors and winepresses will not meet the people’s needs. The term translated fail can also mean ‘*deceive*’, probably referring to the **self-deception** that material blessings are a sign of divine favour.

2. (:3) Relocation to Egypt and Assyria
*“They will not remain in the LORD's land,
But Ephraim will return to Egypt,
And in Assyria they will eat unclean food.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: A clever pun unfolds from the first clause in v. **3**. It is the play on the similar sounding verbs *dwell* (*yāšab*) and *return* (*šûb*). With the play on words comes also the reversal of saving history and, sadly, Israel’s identity. They were once rescued and brought to dwell in YHWH’s land. Now they will be overtaken and returned to Egypt.

The land of Israel is **YHWH’s property**, an integral part of his household. As such, it has sanctity and cannot continue to support the people’s defection from the covenant

ethos and from their covenant Lord. In **4:3** the land is portrayed as ill and in mourning, as if it suffered from the effects of Israel's moral and cultic pollution. Part of the punishment depicted for Israel in **9:3** is that they will be thrust from the land and forced to eat unclean food in Assyria, thereby defiling themselves. The term for *unclean* (*tāmē'*) in **9:3** is an adjective. In **9:4** it is employed as a verb. Hosea's line of thought converges with a basic claim of the pentateuchal Holiness Code: the land belongs to YHWH. While living in it Israel is but an alien or a sojourner with him (**Lev. 25:23**), and there are instructions to **avoid defiling activities** in it. Much of what makes up the instructions for holiness in the Pentateuch is concerned not just with Israel relating rightly to God, but also with Israel attending to that task, in part, by efforts to sanctify time and space. Even Deuteronomy, which concentrates on "*all Israel*" rather than emphasizing priestly sanctification, states repeatedly that the land is YHWH's gift to Israel. From that perspective it contains instruction so that the land is not defiled (**Deut. 21:23**). Hosea's logic runs thusly: If the people profane the covenant and engage in harlotrous activities against YHWH, **they will be expelled from his land**, a constituent element of his household, and be **forced to live in a defiling situation**.

John Goldingay: Letting the harvest fail will not be the end of Yahweh's response (**v. 3**). Ephraim's failure to keep its side of Yahweh's relationship with it will also mean losing its place in his country, as he said (**Lev. 18:25** makes the point more pungently). Theologically, it will go back to Egypt, which had been a place of bondage rather than freedom, or rather a place of subservience to a foreign ruler rather than service to Yahweh. It is also a place to which Ephraim has recently put itself once more into subservience and a place where it will be treated as spoil (see **v. 6**), in some contrast to the way it had once stripped the Egyptians (**Exod. 12:36**).

3. (:4) Ramifications of Being Banished to Pagan Society

*"They will not pour out libations of wine to the LORD,
Their sacrifices will not please Him.
Their bread will be like mourners' bread;
All who eat of it will be defiled,
For their bread will be for themselves alone;
It will not enter the house of the LORD."*

B. (:5-9) Warning of Days of Punishment

Biblehub: God warns of days of punishment and retribution, where their religious festivals will turn into mourning. It is reminiscent of the days of Gibeah, where the Israelites sinned and continued to sin, thus, initiating the cycle of divine punishment.

1. (:5-6) Hard Times Lie Ahead

a. (:5) Banished from Celebratory Feasts

*"What will you do on the day of the appointed festival
And on the day of the feast of the LORD?"*

Trent Butler: Such judgment set up a dilemma for Israel. Three times a year they were to appear before God in annual festival days (**Exod. 23:14–17**). If God would not accept their worship, especially their offerings and sacrifices, what could they do on those days? The highlight of the year vanished in divine punishment. The day of greatest joy became Israel's date with judgment.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The rhetorical question of **v.5** follows naturally. If they are unable geographically and incapable sacramentally of offering what is acceptable to God, then what are the people to do on the “*day of your appointed feasts*” and for the “*festival days of the LORD*”?

b. (:6) Buried Amidst Pagan Nations

*“For behold, they will go because of destruction;
Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them.
Weeds will take over their treasures of silver;
Thorns will be in their tents.”*

Trent Butler: Egypt collected both their money and their refugees, then sent them to the city of Memphis twelve miles south of Cairo, where Israel was buried—filed in the list of nations that used to be significant but would never again return to historical prominence.

J. Andrew Dearman: The last two clauses in **v. 6** are in synonymous parallelism. Thistles and briars are a word pair used elsewhere to portray a sedentary existence gone awry as a result of divine judgment.

2. (:7-9) Hostility towards God Deserves Swift and Severe Punishment

Duane Garrett: This is one text where Hosea has given us **clear parallelism**, which helps when trying to clarify its meaning. One should begin with the structure of the text and develop the interpretation of difficult lines from there. The structure, if one follows the accentuation of the MT, is as follows:

A1 Days of punishment have come,

A2 Days of retribution have come.

—Let Israel know—

B1 The prophet is a fool

B2 The man of the Spirit is mad,

C1 because your iniquity is abundant,

C2 and (because of) the abundance of your hatred. (**v. 7**)

B1' Ephraim's watchman is with my God,

B2' And a prophet is a fowler's snare upon all his [Ephraim's] ways.

C1' Hatred is in the house of his God! (v. 8)
C2' They have deeply corrupted themselves

—as in the days of Gibeah.

A1' He shall remember their iniquity,
A2' He shall deal with their sin. (v. 9)

a. (:7) Arrival of Punishment

*"The days of punishment have come,
The days of retribution have come;
Let Israel know this!
The prophet is a fool, The inspired man is demented,
Because of the grossness of your iniquity,
And because your hostility is so great."*

Allen Guenther: Nothing has changed. Israel has not learned from the past. They do not understand the dangers of consorting with Canaanites, nor do they recognize the Lord's claims to their total loyalty. They have not acknowledged the gift of the good land as a grant of love. *The days of recompense have come* (**Hos. 9:7a**).

J. Andrew Dearman: A popular interpretation of **9:7b** has been to see it as a quotation of the people, who react negatively to Hosea and describe him as a demented fool. This is possible, but it requires textual emendation or a changed speaker who is unidentified. A more straightforward reading sees in **9:7b–c** the continuation of Hosea's critical voice. *Who, then, is the crazy prophet(s) condemned by him?* That prophet would be one who is blind to the imminent danger announced by Hosea, someone who has announced blessing and security for Israel. Such prophets would have been Hosea's opponents. If one interprets **9:7b** as an indictment of Hosea's prophetic opponent(s), then it fits in a larger context of inner-prophetic debate, of which there are several instances elsewhere in the OT.

David Allan Hubbard: That these words are the public reaction to Hosea not his indictment of the false prophets (cf. **4:5**; **Mic. 3:5–8**; **Jer. 23:9–32**) seems clear from the context, where they stand in opposition to **verse 8**, and from the fact that virtually everything Hosea says about prophets supports their divinely sponsored task (**6:5**; **9:8**; **12:13**).

James Mays: This saying is the only direct clue in the entire book of Hosea to the prophet's reception by his countrymen. The window which it opens on his life is however opaque. The speech is tantalizingly brief and at one point (**v. 8a**) exceedingly difficult to follow. There is no accompanying narrative (as in *Amos 7.1* off.) to describe the circumstances of Hosea's persecution. Yet the lines bear witness clearly enough to the scorn, hostility, and danger which surrounded him as he announced the end of the covenant, the rejection of Israel's culture and cult, and the terrible punishment about to

fall upon the nation. His own people to whom he was sent by their God slandered him with the charge of madness and plotted his downfall throughout the land.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Hosea is being scorned for an unpopular message (cf. **Am 7:10–13**; **Jer 29:26–27**; **Wolff**, 152; **Stuart**, 145–46; **Hubbard**, 155). Perhaps his marriage to Gomer qualified him as odd in their eyes as well.

Alternate View:

Trent Butler: Hosea knew the people saw him as wild, uncontrolled, and insane in his accusations and pronouncements. He had a simple answer for such sneering remarks. The perception resulted from a people who were overloaded with injustice, guilt, and punishment.

b. (:8) Accusation of National Failure

*“Ephraim was a watchman with my God, a prophet;
Yet the snare of a bird catcher is in all his ways,
And there is only hostility in the house of his God.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: Both Jeremiah (**6:17**) and Ezekiel (**3:17**; **33:2–7**) apply the role of watchman/sentinel to the prophetic task. If it is a divine calling, then it is carried out in conjunction with God. This, in essence, is the first clause. We might expand its terseness by rendering it: *“A prophet is supposed to be a watchman over Ephraim with God.”* If in **9:7** Hosea excoriates a prophetic opponent as demented, here in **9:8** he begins with a definition of who/what a prophet should be.

c. (:9) Accountability for Deep Depravity

*“They have gone deep in depravity As in the days of Gibeah;
He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins.”*

Trent Butler: The prophet turned to another famous moment in Israel's history—the horrible rape scene perpetrated by the Benjaminites in the city of Gibeah (**Judg. 19–20**). God has a long memory when it comes to unconfessed, unforgiven sin. Hosea can pronounce the sentence with confidence. God will punish them for their sins.

J. Andrew Dearman: The thrust of the verse is that the people have corrupted themselves in a manner similar to a previous event in Gibeah and that God will see to their judgment in the historical process.

II. (:10-17) THE JUDGMENT OF BARRENNESS AND ABANDONMENT

H. D. Beeby: The historical reference in **Hos. 9:9** is followed by a section which includes two other major historical recollections: Baal-peor (**v. 10**) and Gilgal (**v. 15**). Although the wilderness is also mentioned (**v. 10**), the recollections of Baal-peor and Gilgal are more significant; indeed, it is around these two that the whole section revolves. Thus the section divides into two parts: **vv. 10–14**, which develop out of the

Baal-peor episode, and vv. 15–17, which have Gilgal as their focal point. These similarities are not the only ones which exist between the two parts; there are **parallels** both in form and in content. Each part has its source in a place where momentous events occurred in the past and which has acquired a certain symbolic and representational value. Mention is made of the sins associated with the place and the continuing comparable sins in the present. Threats and judgment follow which in both cases include lack of fertility, population depletion, and the death of children at God's hand. Finally, each part concludes a divine speech with a prophetic utterance (vv. 14 and 17); that in v. 14 is clearly a prayer for disaster to fall, and that in v. 17 can be read as a prayer which is in effect a curse. Continuities with what has gone before are everywhere; two deserve special mention. We have met the emphasis on cultic and kingly sins before, especially in **chs. 7 and 8**. The two parts of this section divide along these lines: **9:10–14** concentrates on the cultic ways, while **vv. 15–17** are more concerned with the sins of the leaders. The second continuity is with **8:7**. In both parts of the present section it is not difficult to see both the unwelcome harvest theme and the disproportionate effect.

Trent Butler: A history of sin and a prophet's approval support God's decision to wipe out the people he once loved.

Anthony Petterson: This section contains the first of four images showing that Israel has fallen miserably from its earlier glorious state and will be punished for its sin. Israel was like delightful fruit, like grapes in the desert and early fruit on the fig tree (**v. 10**). In Hebrew "*Ephraim*" sounds like the word for "*fruit*." Yet early in its history, the Israelites committed idolatry and sexual immorality at Baal Peor on the plains of Moab (**Nu 25:1-9; 1Co 10:8**). Israel's glorious status as God's blessed people will depart, and Israel will be under the curses of barrenness and death. God will turn from his people, and the result will be devastating. Tyre, an island city on the Mediterranean, was renowned for its great wealth and the security of its seawalls (cf. **Zec 9:3**). Ephraim too was wealthy and secure, but it would be conquered. The slayer (**v. 13**) refers to Assyria and Egypt (**vv. 3, 6**). In light of this, Hosea interjects a request for judgment: a reversal of the blessing of Joseph by Jacob (**v. 14**; cf. **Ge 49:25**). The wickedness of Israel is fully on display in the corrupt worship at Gilgal (cf. **Hos 4:15; 12:11**). God's hatred is expressed by driving the people out of his presence. No longer loving them echoes **Hosea 1:6-7** and **2:23**. The delightful fruit is no more. The fruit of the womb will be slain (**Hos 9:16**; cf. **Ps 127:3**). **Hosea 9:17** is another interjection by Hosea that links Israel's disobedience with exile.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The tone of this section changes dramatically to **historical retrospect**. Yahweh's speech is more reflective, but no less anguished. The two divine speeches, **verses 10–13** and **verses 15–16**, are followed by two prayers by Hosea for the deserved punishment of the people, **verse 14** and **verse 17**. This alternation of divine speech and prophetic prayer is like the accounts of prophetic visions and responses in **Isaiah 6:8–11** and **Amos 7:1–6**. **Wolff** proposes that this section of Hosea comes from a time shortly after the address of **9:1–9** when Hosea could no longer speak publicly because of the opposition, but spoke to an inner circle of those with like convictions. **Stuart**

suggests a time in the “mid-720s, very close to or at the beginning of the fall of the North.”

Duane Garrett: This section also has an underlying **chiastic structure**, as follows:

- A Israel found in the desert (v. 10a)
- B Israel apostatizes from God (v. 10b)
- C Ephraim barren; even if they bear children, God will slay them (vv. 11–12)
- D Comparison to Tyre; children go to “slayer” (v. 13)
- E Prophet's prayer (v. 14)
- D' Sin at Gilgal; people expelled and leaders stubborn (v. 15)
- C' Ephraim barren; even if they rear children, God will slay them (v. 16)
- B' Israel disobeys God and is rejected (v. 17a)
- A' Israel a wanderer among the nations (v. 17b)

David Allan Hubbard: This brief section takes its title from the simile with which it begins. It needs to be divided into five short sub-sections:

An accusation based on Israel's failed potential early in their history – **verse 10**;

An announcement of judgment in a chain-link argument that threatens literal extinction of Ephraim's descendants – **verses 11–12**;

An expansion of the announcement which culminates in a prayer curse on Ephraim's reproductivity – **verses 13–14**;

An announcement of judgment in exile with an accusation that centres in Gilgal where Saul was first crowned king (**1 Sam. 11:14–15**) – **verse 15**;

An announcement that sums up what has been said about Ephraim's double judgment of fruitlessness and exile – **verses 16–17**.

A. (:10-14) Baal-Peor Episode – Past Rebellion the Model for Deserving the Curse of Barrenness

Biblehub: Downfall of Israel -- Israel, once compared to a fruitful vine and luxurious fig tree, has now fallen into disgrace because of their Baal worship. God promises to drive them out of His house and take away their blessings, making their land barren and leaving no offspring.

1. (:10) Perverting Divine Favor

“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;

I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first

*season. But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame,
And they became as detestable as that which they loved.”*

Lloyd Ogilvie: The key for the interpretation of this verse is to remember that the name **Ephraim** was closely connected to the word **fruitful**. And this is exactly what the chosen vine and fig tree of Ephraim eventually proved not to be. Not in the wilderness, not in Hosea’s time, and not in response to the Messiah. . .

Jesus called His disciples to **fruitfulness**. His judgment on the Israel of His day was that the tree of God produced leaves of religion but not the fruit of righteousness in individuals and the nation as a whole. Combining a discussion of this parable [**Matt. 7:15-20**] with **Hosea 9:10** reveals the fruitfulness that delights God and the fruitlessness that disappoints him.

J. Andrew Dearman: Poetic parallelism puts grapes and early figs together as delightful surprises in the wilderness. Part of the surprise is simply the presence of the fruit in such an infertile region. To the extent that the wilderness is equated with the desert, fresh fruit is an impossibility apart from an oasis. The wilderness can be a rugged area with little or no cultivation, but not necessarily the desert. To find a grapevine or a fig tree in a sheltered crevice or hidden valley in a rugged, semi-arid region would be quite surprising, but not impossible. Delectable fruit, a real joy when passing through a wilderness, puts YHWH’s acquisition of Israel in personal and emotive terms. **He took delight in them.**

Trent Butler: God looks with fondness to the beginning of his history with Israel. He found them in the Egyptian wilderness and delivered them at the Red Sea. His loving action was so surprising it had to be compared to finding grapes in the midst of the desolate, arid wilderness (**Ezek. 16:6–16**). The discovery brought joy like tasting the very first sweet fig on a new fig tree (**Isa. 28:4**) after a long season without figs.

But divine joy was short-lived. Israel moved through the wilderness to Baal Peor. There they aligned themselves with the Canaanite gods in worship (**Num. 25**). Worship of such a shameful thing made Israel an abomination just as the idols were an abomination to God (**Ezek. 5:11**). Hosea ends the verse with the language of love from the first three chapters, for they became as vile as the thing they loved. As Gomer loved prostitution, so Israel loved false gods. This was not a one-time affair. It was a habit dating back to the wilderness. Israel did not break its habit of idolatry, so God had to break Israel.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: He likens the people to grapes and ripe figs. Finding these in the arid regions of that part of the world brings joy (cf. **Isa 28:4**), but that pristine goodness soon turned to rebellion at Baal Peor in Moab (**Nu 25; Ps 106:28–30**). There they indulged in idolatry and sexual promiscuity with foreign women.

John Goldingay: Yahweh himself now looks back, in a remarkable pair of new images (cf. **Mic. 7:1**). Imagine you’re in the wilderness and you’d love something fresh and sweet, and then you find a vine with **grapes** on it. Or imagine that summer is

approaching and you'd love something fresh and sweet, and then you find the first fruit on a **fig tree**, the particularly tasty fruit that grows on last year's shoots (cf. **Isa. 28:4**). That's how I felt about Israel, about the ancestors of the present generation, Yahweh says. One shouldn't press or allegorize the notions of finding or seeing, or the location in the wilderness. The analogy is like that of Israel as Yahweh's bride; the point is the **delight of the early relationship**.

2. (:11-12) Punishing Israel with Barrenness

*"As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird—
No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!
Though they bring up their children,
Yet I will bereave them until not a man is left.
Yes, woe to them indeed when I depart from them!"*

J. Andrew Dearman: The Hebrew text of **9:11–12** is almost **staccato** in expression, conveying what may be pent-up emotions in terse declarations. Hosea has elsewhere compared Israel to a senseless dove that will be brought down by YHWH's net (**7:11–12**). Here the comparison with birds in flight is different. Ephraim's glory will depart abruptly, leaving behind devastating consequences. Indeed, it is YHWH himself, Ephraim's true glory, who is leaving. The terminology in **9:11** is a reversal of the nation's fertility. There will be no conceiving and bearing of children, but even if parents raise children, they will become childless.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: "*Glory*" may refer to Israel's wealth or its posterity, but it is better to interpret the term as a descriptor for Yahweh (cf. **1Sa 4:21–22; Eze 8**). He who should have been their security and the object of their affections will leave and turn the nation over to a dreadful fate. The One who could give Israel life now **decrees sterility (v.11b)**. This reversal is matched by the inverse order of the verbs for childbearing. The severity of these words is strengthened in **v.12a**, that God will remove any children that might survive the disaster. What should have been occasions for joy will be motives for mourning. Such is the **result of divine abandonment (v.12b)**.

Derek Kidner: But whether or not they cared about the loss of glory or of God, there was another and more tangible loss to face. From **verse 11** to the end of the chapter the family tree of Ephraim (that is, of the northern tribes) is seen either dying back or being lopped of all new growth. They have worshipped fertility through the sex-rites of Baal, and they have sold their souls for peace: their judgment will be infertility and war. Here again it is a blend of natural and supernatural processes: natural, in that in any case the abuse of sex tends towards disease and to the barrenness of **11b** and **14**, and that broken treaties tend to leave a country friendless (**12-13**); but supernatural in that God will see this matter through to the bitter end.

3. (:13) Presenting Remaining Children for Slaughter

*"Ephraim, as I have seen, Is planted in a pleasant meadow like Tyre;
But Ephraim will bring out his children for slaughter."*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: To lead their children to the slaughter, therefore, means that their sin will result in their families' meeting death at the hands of the invader.

4. (:14) Pleading Degenerates into Cursing

*"Give them, O LORD-- what wilt Thou give?
Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts."*

Trent Butler: The prophet appears to take up his role as intercessor for his people to God as he begins, *Give them, O LORD*, but then he stops to ask himself a question: *what will you give them?* . . . In such a situation, the prophet cannot intercede on behalf of the people. He can only urge God on. This is a sign of the nation's desperate situation. It took such strong language to get the people's attention.

H. D. Beeby: The prophet who gave us the phrase "like people, like priest" (4:9) might also have given us the expression "like past, like present." Frequently, and especially in the latter part of the book, the principle is demonstrated. What Israel was, it still is. What Israel is, it has been from the earliest days. But this only applies to a **continuity of sin**.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Miscarrying wombs and dry breasts would be in direct contradiction to the false prayers for fertility offered in the Baal rites. Hosea in essence asks for punishment to fit the crime of harlotry, but not annihilation.

B. (:15-17) Gilgal as Focal Point for Failures of Israel

Biblehub: God's Wrath and Israel's Destruction -- God's wrath is upon Israel, and He will forget them. Their persistence in sinning and idol worship has led to their ultimate destruction and dispersal among nations. The chapter ends with a depiction of a strong rejection of Israel due to their defiance.

1. (:15) Rebellion Turns God against the Nation

*"All their evil is at Gilgal; Indeed, I came to hate them there!
Because of the wickedness of their deeds
I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more;
All their princes are rebels."*

Trent Butler: How could such a situation develop between God and his people? Hosea pointed the finger at the nation's rebellious or stubborn leaders. Israel's leaders never learned. They followed Baal and its fertility cult to the very end of their nation's existence.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: A literal reading of the Hebrew is "*All their sin is at Gilgal.*" Gilgal is targeted as an unacceptable cultic center in several passages (4:15; 12:11)—a stance echoed in Amos (Am 4:4; 5:5). It was a symbol of all that has been wrong with the faith of Israel, and there the nation's misconstrued worldview finds religious

authorization; so Yahweh will expel the people from the sanctuary (“*my house*”; cf. **8:1; 9:8**).

Allen Guenther: *Gilgal* has a triple significance in Israel’s history.

- First, it was the base of operations from which Joshua launched the attack against the inhabitants of Palestine (**Josh. 9:6; 10:6; 14:6**). In preparation Joshua had the people circumcised (**Josh. 5**). Circumcision signifies purification of the means of procreation (fertility); circumcision signals that obedience to God.
- Second, *Gilgal* also marked the end of dependence on manna and quails. There Israel began to eat the produce of the land. *Gilgal*, therefore, symbolizes the fulfillment of the promised blessings.
- Third, every Israelite would see more in the name *Gilgal*. There Saul was confirmed as king (**1 Sam. 11:12-15**). There Saul lost the kingdom when he disobeyed Samuel by offering a sacrifice when Samuel did not appear on the seventh day as promised (**1 Sam. 13:1-15**). So *Gilgal* also brings to mind the beginning of a disobedient and rebellious monarchy (**Hos. 9:15c**).

God gathers together Israel’s failure to acknowledge God’s gifts and the failure of leadership in the one word, *Gilgal*.

There also, God’s **hatred** emerged against this people (**9:15a**). They had hardly gained a foothold in the land before he determined to expel them from it (**9:15b**).

2. (:16) Retribution on Israel’s Progeny

*“Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, They will bear no fruit.
Even though they bear children,
I will slay the precious ones of their womb.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Israel is a sick plant, not the luxurious vine that God found and wanted to flourish (**v.10**).

Trent Butler: Hosea turns again to the agricultural world for metaphors to describe the situation of God’s people. They are beaten down like grain under hot sun without rain or under the feet of advancing enemy armies. Baal could prevent neither the famine nor the fearful enemy advance. The Lord chose not to prevent either. All the fertility efforts made in the name of Baal or in the name of God will fail because they are not the worship efforts God demands from his people. He focuses on loving the Lord, the one true God, and loving one another.

J. Andrew Dearman: Three linked terms for **destruction** are used in **9:16**. They are strike or “*smite*” (*nāḱā*), dry up or “*wither away*” (*yābaš*), and put to death or “*kill*”

(*mût*; Hiphil). The first and third occur in descriptions of warfare and its destruction (**Jer. 43:11; 52:27**). Withering is the result of being struck (**Jonah 4:7; Zech. 10:11**).

3. (:17) Removal from God's Presence

*"My God will cast them away Because they have not listened to Him;
And they will be wanderers among the nations."*

Trent Butler: No longer is the Lord Israel's God. He is only Hosea's God. All the rest of the nation is rejected. Just as the people wandered in the wilderness under Moses, so they will now wander among the nations they earlier sought for help. They will suffer shame and loss of power and prestige as enemies send them into exile.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Exile from the land "*among the nations*" as the curse for rebellion is Israel's future (**v.3**; cf. **Lev 26:33, 38; Dt 28:64**).

Derek Kidner: So the chapter ends with a reiteration of the nation's immediate prospect, which was equally God's sentence and their own choice; **a fourfold doom of barrenness, carnage, estrangement and homelessness**. The last of these, '*they shall be wanderers among the nations*', was to become, tragically, part of their distinctive and proverbial reputation – yet it was not the last word that God would have for them. For this, see **Romans 11** in its entirety, but especially **verses 11-16** and **25** to the end.

Gary Smith: They are no longer his people but will be fugitives, wandering homeless and aimless among the nations. Hosea may well be remembering God's earlier rejection of Saul at Gilgal (**1 Sam. 15:23**) and seeing how this rejection now extends to the whole nation. This truly is a depressing ending—without hope, without divine love, and without a prophet to intercede.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is prosperity always a confirmation of the Lord's blessing?
- 2) When is joy not appropriate for a believer?
- 3) Are days of punishment and retribution just over the horizon for America?
- 4) How does an amil perspective account for the numerous prophecies dealing with the ethnic nation of Israel being banished from the Promised Land with the promise of some type of future regathering and restoration?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

H. D. Beeby: Rejected by God, then, **what does the future hold for Ephraim?** “*They shall be wanderers among the nations.*” At the Exodus the power of fate had been broken. Chosen to be God’s peculiar people, they were free of the gods of the nations and of the kings of the nations. They were also liberated from the powers of nature and from the fates, because God is supreme, above all earthly and heavenly powers. In their rejection by God the people were now subject to the “*principalities and powers*” and were fated to be wanderers. Jacob had wandered to Egypt in search of food, but Hosea sees not merely a return to a patriarchal life of wandering. He sees a reversion to the state of Cain, who was a fugitive and wanderer with everyone’s hand against him. Israel had chosen a life with the nations as any other nation, but this was not possible. Only two possibilities faced them: either to be the bride of Yahweh or to be a wanderer among the nations, aliens without a real identity. God had created Israel for himself. In him was their only rest; without him there was only **restlessness**.

Robin Routledge: vv. 1-9 -- This section continues the theme of judgment on an unfaithful people. Israel claims to know God (8:2) and goes through the motions of religious observance. The people may believe they are doing what God requires, but it is empty ritual. Israel has been called into a covenant relationship with Yahweh (8:1) which should be expressed in faithful obedience. Yet they do not acknowledge him in their political decisions, they look to other things for security and their worship is tainted with idolatry. In all this they have lost sight of the God who made them, they disregard his requirements and they reject his messages of correction. As a result, they are unfit to live in the land, here referred to as Yahweh’s house, and will be removed to a place of exile, where festivals will no longer be celebrated and sacrifices no longer offered. These privations correspond to the discipline referred to earlier (cf. 2:11; 3:4). The aim there, however, is eventual restoration, and although 8:1 – 9:9 focuses primarily on **judgment**, further passages will refer again to the hope of return and renewal.

Going through the motions of worship, losing sight of God as the source of blessing, putting trust in other things, excluding God from decisions and disregarding his requirements in everyday life are not limited to Israel. Within the Christian community there is the same danger of moving God to the sidelines, of forgetting who he is, what he has done and what the proper response to him should be. And sometimes, being given up to the choices they make and having a glimpse of life without God’s provision may be necessary to bring wanderers to their senses. However, such is the love of God in Christ that he always provides a way back.

Gary Smith: In the midst of a joyful harvest festival, Hosea boldly stands up and adamantly admonishes his listeners. Above the noise of joyful singing and dancing he shouts, as it were: “Stop the music! Stop celebrating! The party is over!” This must have seemed like a crazy thing to say since everyone is happy and having a good time. Certainly there cannot be anything wrong with celebrating the divine blessing of a good

harvest, right? God has even instructed his people to rejoice (**Lev. 23:39–43; Deut. 16:13–15**) at the Feast of Booths. So what's the problem?

Hosea argues that the people should not be conducting their feasts like the pagans in other nations (**Hos. 9:1**). Apparently this festival changed over the years into a pagan celebration by adding activities common in Baal festivals, such as sacred prostitution at their threshing floors. This paganization of Israel's faith (see **4:10–14**) is an act of unfaithful prostitution against God. But the people love the rewards of a good harvest (the "*prostitute's wages*" in **9:1**) more than they love God, so they have added Baal practices to ensure a better harvest.

In response, God will reverse their false theology and remove the fertility of the land, thus proving that Baalism does not work (**9:2**); he will also reverse the people's security by exiling them from God's holy land and putting them in some other countries (Egypt and Assyria). Because of their own uncleanness, they will eat unclean food in an unholy land. They will get exactly what they have wanted and exactly what they have chosen; they choose not to be the holy people of God.

In these pagan countries the Israelites will be unable to give to God their Levitical sacrifices (**Lev. 1–5; 23:13; Num. 15:1–10**), so it will be impossible to please him. By comparing their sacrifices to "*the bread of mourners*" (**Hos. 9:4**), Hosea is saying that they will not sacrifice, for mourners who touch a dead body are unclean and cannot offer sacrifice to God (see **Num. 19:11–16**). . .

The final paragraph [**9:10–17**] is divided into two parallel segments: **9:10–14** and **9:15–17**. Both draw on past sinful events in the history of Israel (Baalism at Baal Peor and Gilgal) to make comparisons with the situation in Hosea's time. Both portions end with a brief prophetic prayer and compare Israel's punishment to having no fruit or fertility.

David Thompson: WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIVING A LIFE OF DEEP DEPRAVITY, THEIR WORLD WILL EVENTUALLY FALL COMPLETELY APART AS A DIRECT PUNISHMENT AND JUDGMENT OF GOD

Jonathan Edwards used to use an illustration that I like to borrow. He used to say that the anger and wrath of God against someone is like water that is dammed up at the present time. The people keep sinning and the water level rises higher and higher with every sin. The more the sin is not faced, the more the anger of God is stored up and eventually when the water reaches a certain level God will open the door and the water will gush forth and destroy the people.

When God's people plunge into deep depravity there are six results:

RESULT #1 – God will not allow His people to have joy . **9:1-6**

Reality #1 - They are not able to rejoice . **9:1**

Reality #2 - They do not have prosperity and provisions . **9:2**

Reality #3 - They do not remain in their land . **9:3**

Reality #4 - They cannot worship and please God. **9:4**

RESULT #2 – God will punish His people and bring retribution, **9:7-9**

Reason #1 - They viewed men who preached God's Word as foolish and demented . **9:7a**

Reason #2 - They were involved in gross, perverse iniquity . **9:7b**

Reason #3 - They were greatly hostile to God and His Word. **9:7c-8**

Reason #4 - They were deep in depravity . **9:9**

RESULT #3 – God will cause His glory to fly away. **9:10-14**

Reason #1 - Because My people are doing shameful things. **9:10a**

Reason #2 - Because My people are doing detestable things. **9:10b**

RESULT #4 – God will hate His own people. **9:15**

RESULT #5 – God will cause His own people to be fruitless . **9:16**

RESULT #6 – God will cast away His own people. **9:17**

TEXT: Hosea 10:1-15

TITLE: *SOW WICKEDNESS AND REAP GOD'S JUDGMENT*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S NATION CHARACTERIZED BY INIQUITY AND IDOLATRY MUST CONVERT OR SUFFER THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF CONDEMNATION

INTRODUCTION:

Gary Smith: This section has a good deal of continuity with the previous one, since both condemn Israel's false worship at pagan temples and at the golden calves. The difference is seen in the absence of first-person speeches in **chapter 10** (except **10:10–11**) and in a greater emphasis on accusations rather than punishment statements. Like **9:10**, **10:1** draws the analogy between grape vines and Israel; like **8:7**, **10:12–13** uses the sowing and reaping metaphor. Both chapters refer to the sin at Gibeah (**9:9**; **10:9**) and the slaughter of children in war (**9:13**; **10:14**). The tragedy is that God has told his people what they must do, but they refuse to do it. God encourages them to seek him so that they may experience his steadfast covenant love (**10:12**), but they are wicked and deceptive (**10:13**). . .

The message of this chapter is structured into two large sections. The first (**10:1–8**) focuses on the detestable altars (**10:1, 2, 8**) where the Israelites worship, while the second (**10:9–15**) is centered around the wickedness that will bring war and destruction on the nation. Although the demise of Israel's king and the victory of a great Assyrian king are briefly mentioned (**10:6–7, 15**), this message is primarily concerned with the **religious unfaithfulness at her temples**.

Derek Kidner: **Time to Seek the Lord** -- There is great variety in this chapter, for all its insistence on a single theme of warning. It draws now on early history (**9**), now on more recent memories (**14**); it bombards us with lively metaphors (**4, 7, 11**), ominous predictions (**7-8**), commonsense logic (**13**), snatches of current talk (**3**); it is always changing its angle of attack. But its thrust is positive: to spur the reader, not to stun him. The one gleam of light, **the invitation of verse 12**, is the *raison d'être* of the whole chapter.

Trent Butler: **Main Idea:** God's love for his people guarantees that they cannot act any way they want without expecting him to **respond in judgment**.

Vv. 1-8 -- Political and religious history paint God's people as sinners who must face punishment for their false worship, false politics, and false religion.

Vv. 9-15 – A history of sin represents rebellion against God's righteous purposes and calls for divine war against God's own people.

I. (:1-8) CONDEMNATION AND CONSEQUENCES

Lloyd Ogilvie: **Hosea 10:1–8** is obviously a continuation of the prophet's address in **9:10–17**. During an interlude in Hosea's public ministry, he grapples with the question, "*How did Israel get to this stage of apostasy?*" The prophet reflectively discusses the nation's petulant persistence down the path of rebellion and anticipates God's judgment of destruction. Now he sees more clearly the **real root of Israel's sickness**.

The problem is a divided heart. Depending on the vocalization of the text, there are two possible renderings of the Hebrew: "*Their heart is false (hālaq RSV),*" or, "*Their heart is divided (hullaq).*" Both strike at the essential spiritual malady: falseness in turning from God to false gods and a divided heart by giving loyalty to both. *Hālaq* also means "deceitful," literally "smooth." Applied to the heart, this would mean a slippery loyalty. God wanted wholehearted devotion and intentional commitment to Him and the covenant. He abhorred the double-minded, half and half, divided heart of His people that made them false and slippery in their commitment. He demanded from His people what His heart had consistently expressed to them: faithfulness (יֵ֫מֶת, *ēmet*), trustworthiness (עֲמֻנָה, *ēmûnâ*), and loyalty (*hesed*). God required an undivided heart (*šālēm*). . .

The hard truth for us is that words are not enough. When there is no congruity between what we say and do, soon our words become empty religiosity. The test of what we say is what we do to remove our false gods and how we put words into actions in living our faith.

James Mays: **10.1–8** portrays the judgment of Yahweh as it falls upon every significant institution of Israel's religious and national life. Altar and pillar, king and capital, idol and high place – one by one they are blotted out until the people are left alone to face the wrath of Yahweh, crying out for the sanctuary of death in consternation.

H. D. Beeby: There is considerable agreement that these verses **form a unit** and that therefore they should be exegeted in close relationship with one another. Reasons for such a decision are:

- 1) The first and last verses include the word "*Israel*." This is one of Hosea's devices for marking beginnings and endings of subsections.
- 2) The address throughout is similar. It is not God speaking but someone speaking about God—presumably the prophet.
- 3) The eight verses divide into **four strophes of two verses each**. The first three strophes, vv. **1–2, 3–4, 5–6**, have the same form—several lines of accusation culminating in a threat.
- 4) Each of the first three strophes is devoted to one of Hosea's three great topics: cult, king, and calf, in that order. **The fourth strophe seems to conclude the section by including all three.**

A. (:1-2) Accusation of Religious Perversion -- Metaphor of the Deceitful Vine

H. Ronald Vandermeijer: Refusing to acknowledge that these blessings had come from God, Israel produced “*fruit for himself*” rather than for the Lord. Accordingly, the Lord decrees that their heart is “*faithless*” (Hebrew, *chalaq*; literally “divided, smooth, tricky, treacherous”). A faithless or divided heart had long been Israel’s tragic flaw. Elijah, a century earlier than Hosea, encountered this divided loyalty when he asked the people, “*How long will you hesitate between two opinions?*” (**1 Kings 18:21**). Even today, we need to be exhorted not to be “**double-minded**,” for such an attitude leads to instability and ruin (**James 1:8**). Through the law, Israel had received a sense of what was right, but that sense was met by an overwhelming love for doing what was wrong. For choosing the bad, Hosea warns that the people will bear their own “*guilt*” (Hebrew, *asham*; used only here in the Old Testament).

1. (:1) Serving Self Rather than God

a. Picture of the Deceitful Vine

*“Israel is a luxuriant vine;
He produces fruit for himself.”*

Biblehub: The phrase “*yielding fruit for himself*” indicates self-centeredness and a failure to honor God with their prosperity. The vine, instead of producing fruit for God's glory, serves its own interests, highlighting Israel's spiritual decline and idolatry.

Allen Guenther: The grapevine, Israel, bears fruit which corresponds to its nature. The harvest matches the nation’s character. From the opening line, Hosea launches into a negative account of national religious life.

Three specific indictments follow.

1. First, as the vine has matured and produced more fruit, the Israelites have responded by increasing the number of altars (**10:1b**). Two sins are represented.
 - The first is the one of providing more centers of worship, an act which bears multiple consequences. The many shrines result in a diminished sense of the larger community. Increasing centers for sacrifice eventually leads to perceiving God as a local deity.
 - A second sin implied in the accusation of multiplying altars has to do with the Israelites’ concept of faith and God. Israel places a premium on the activity of the worshiper. Religious ritual has become a means of salvation.
2. The second indictment is that as the land has prospered, Israel has beautified the symbols of worship at high places (**10:1c**). Aesthetic pleasure is not the issue; making sin attractive is the problem. Israel was not to use stone pillars (phallic symbols?) known as *masebah*. God repeatedly commanded them to destroy all such pagan aids to worship (**Exod. 23:24**; cf. **Hos. 3:4**).
3. The third indictment touches the heart (**Hos. 10:2a**). At a deep level Israel has come to pursue the Lord for his gifts and Baal for his benefits. They have come to

justify their simultaneous worship of these two gods.

John Schultz: The context suggests that the blessing of Israel's fruitfulness turned into a curse because of the use that was made of it. None of the abundance was used for the glory of God but for self-satisfaction and idolatry. As the empty fig tree on which Jesus found no fruit, so God found nothing to satisfy Himself on Israel's vine. The fruitfulness of Ephraim had become meaningless

b. Prosperity Led to Multiplied Ostentatious Religious Displays

*"The more his fruit, The more altars he made;
The richer his land, The better he made the sacred pillars."*

Robin Routledge: v. 1 -- Increased fruit led to a corresponding increase in altars (cf. **8:11**), and the more prosperous the land, the more ornate the sacred stones. Altars and sacred stones or pillars could feature in the legitimate worship of Yahweh. In this context, however, they are associated with Baal (cf. v. 2): the more Yahweh prospered them, the more they lavished on false worship.

Biblehub: "Sacred pillars" were often associated with Canaanite religious practices and idolatry (**Exodus 34:13, Deuteronomy 12:3**). As the land produced abundantly, Israel invested in these pagan symbols, further entrenching themselves in idolatry. This reflects a cultural assimilation with surrounding nations, contrary to God's command to remain distinct (**Leviticus 20:26**). The prosperity intended to lead to gratitude and worship of God instead resulted in increased devotion to false gods, illustrating the nation's spiritual adultery.

David Allan Hubbard: What we have is a picture of God and Israel utterly at cross-purposes. Yahweh's abundant grace is wantonly squandered (v. 1b). . .

The motif of multiplication (cf. at **4:7; 8:11**) is expanded here in two ways:

- (1) God is featured as the one who took the initiative in multiplying Israel's blessings; Israel's response was to pervert them; and
- (2) a motif of improvement based on the Hebrew root *tb*, 'good' (cf. on **3:5**) is used to embellish the passage by showing that, while Yahweh outdid himself in working for the betterment of the land, all of that excess bounty was poured by Israel into the adornment and decoration of the pillars whose purpose by Hosea's time had become largely pagan. . .

Neither the pattern of multiplication nor improvement (cf. on v. 1) could spare the cultic paraphernalia once God's verdict was rendered.

2. (:2) Storing Up Guilt Requiring Punishment

a. Principle of Accountability

*"Their heart is faithless;
Now they must bear their guilt."*

Biblehub: Their hearts are devious -- This phrase highlights the inner moral and spiritual corruption of the people of Israel. The heart, in biblical terms, often represents the center of one's being, including thoughts, emotions, and will. Deviousness suggests deceit and a turning away from God's commandments. This reflects the broader theme in Hosea of Israel's unfaithfulness, akin to spiritual adultery. The deceitful heart is a recurring theme in Scripture, as seen in **Jeremiah 17:9**, which describes the heart as "*deceitful above all things.*"

James Mays: 'Now' introduces the **verdict of Yahweh**, as it often does in Hosea's oracles (**5.7; 8.10, 13**). Yahweh himself shall bring upon them the consequences of their guilt and in his terrible action end the evasion and create encounter. The altars and pillars will in the end serve as a place of knowing Yahweh's nearness – when they are shattered and destroyed! Then their false heart will have no way to pretend to seek Yahweh while only pursuing its own desires.

- b. Punishment via Destruction of Instruments of Idolatry
*"The LORD will break down their altars
And destroy their sacred pillars."*

Gary Smith: Israel is like a destroyed vine because she has selfishly used its fruit for herself. This misuse took place at their many altars and before the pagan sacred pillars, which represented different gods. They presumptuously use what God has given them and offer it to pagan fertility gods, hoping that these gods will bless them with even greater prosperity. Thus, God's blessings are causing them to sink further and further into sin at these pagan altars. In order to reveal the falseness and deceptiveness of their thinking, God will hold the people accountable, take away their abundance, and demolish the altars and sacred pillars (**10:2**). One should not confuse God with an idol or give an idol credit for God's rich blessings.

B. (:3-4) Accusation of No Governance and No Integrity

1. (:3) No Governance

*"Surely now they will say, 'We have no king,
For we do not revere the LORD.
As for the king, what can he do for us?'"*

Biblehub: We have no king -- Historically, this reflects the political instability in Israel during Hosea's time. The Northern Kingdom experienced frequent changes in leadership, with several kings being assassinated or overthrown. This instability is seen as a direct result of the nation's spiritual unfaithfulness. Biblically, the absence of a king also symbolizes a lack of divine guidance, as the king was supposed to be God's representative on earth.

What can a king do for us? -- This rhetorical question underscores the futility of relying on human leadership when the people are spiritually bankrupt. It reflects a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment with earthly powers. Biblically, it echoes the sentiment found in **Psalms 146:3**, which warns against putting trust in princes.

Theologically, it points to the need for divine intervention and foreshadows the coming of Jesus Christ, the true King who provides spiritual salvation and eternal hope.

James Mays: By means of a quotation the prophet **dramatizes the despair** which grips Ephraim when their king is gone and they realize that they are without king or God. The significance of the quotation is ambiguous. Does the prophet repeat in an ironic taunt what the people are already saying? Or is the quotation a portrayal of their future situation when judgment has left them without a king? It is conceivable that after the murder of Pekah some of the people attributed their desperate circumstances during the Assyrian invasion to his assassination. But the second possibility is the more likely interpretation.

Trent Butler: Here is the only place where Hosea uses the language of **fearing or revering the Lord**—language basic to Israel's relationship to God—a relationship built on awe, respect, reverence, and fear of God (**1 Sam. 12:14**). Thus “*fear of the LORD*” is a shorthand description of the relationship God expects humans to have with him (**Prov. 2:5**). Without this proper religious relationship, all political relationships, commitments, and hopes were useless.

Derek Kidner: We might well wonder whether arrogance or apathy is the greater of two evils for a nation. For Israel, the mood had swung between the two, marked by their changing attitudes towards the throne: at one moment pinning all their hopes to kingship (‘*Give me a king and princes*’, **13:10**), at another cheapening it with debauchery and tearing it apart with assassinations (**7:3-7**); finally, here in **verse 3**, shrugging it off as meaningless, along with everything else, from the Lord downwards. Only their superstition, their talisman the golden calf, will awaken any sense of loss by its removal.

2. (:4) No Integrity

*“They speak mere words,
With worthless oaths they make covenants;
And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds
in the furrows of the field.”*

Derek Kidner: When heaven is considered empty (‘*we fear not the Lord*’, **3**), words and promises soon follow suit, and justice, so-called, becomes a parody of its true self – no longer towering impartially above the strong and the weak, but earthbound and tortuous, springing from the thoughts and policies of the moment; no longer a force for good and for the nation’s health, but a source of poison. The picture of it as a weed which takes over a farmer’s field (**4**) provides a startling contrast to the majestic metaphors of height and depth and clarity associated with true, divine justice (‘*on high, out of . . . sight*’, **Ps. 10:5**; ‘*like the great deep*’, **Ps. 36:6**; ‘*as the light*’, **Ho. 6:5**). The accusation is borne out by history. At best, **humanism** takes its estimate of morality and justice from ground level – from whatever happens to be a society’s current mood and practice; while at worst, tyrants and demagogues equate it simply with their policies and

interests. So the false morality strengthens its hold on the community, choking the true values as a wild crop smothers the good growth under its spreading carpet.

Biblehub: They speak mere words -- This phrase highlights the insincerity and emptiness of the Israelites' promises and declarations. In the context of Hosea, the prophet often condemns the people for their superficial worship and lack of genuine commitment to God. This reflects a broader biblical theme where God desires truth in the inward parts (**Psalms 51:6**) and condemns lip service without heart engagement (**Isaiah 29:13**). The emphasis on "*mere words*" suggests a disconnect between what is spoken and what is truly believed or intended.

So judgment springs up like poisonous weeds -- The imagery of judgment as "*poisonous weeds*" suggests something that is both inevitable and destructive. In an agrarian society, weeds were a common threat to crops, symbolizing sin's pervasive and corrupting influence. This metaphor indicates that the consequences of Israel's deceitful actions are as natural and unavoidable as weeds overtaking a field. The idea of judgment as a natural outgrowth of sin is echoed in **Galatians 6:7**, where Paul warns that **a man reaps what he sows**.

Allen Guenther: The one who **swears oaths** invites God as Guarantor. To *swear falsely* is a deliberate act of deceit while using the Lord's name. It shows disdain for God, essentially regarding him impotent and irrelevant. If anything, God has become a means to a greater end – the welfare of the nation state.

James Mays: The harvest of **royal treachery** had been a **false justice** that killed rather than saved. The fields of the nation bore poison weed instead of grain. The metaphor is quite similar to the one used by Amos (**4.15; 8.14**) and may be borrowed from him or could reflect a saying that was current among those who suffered under the king's justice. In the coming judgment all Israel would learn to speak such bitter words and their lament would announce their own guilt in making kings in autonomous independence of Yahweh.

John Schultz: **Verses 4-8** describe again the **moral decline** of the nation by the perversion of justice. The words: "*They make many promises*" are the NIV's rendering of the Hebrew, which simply states: "*They have spoken words*." The thought obviously is that words have become meaningless. A given word was no longer identical to a reliable promise. A break with God results in a moral vacuum. But a moral vacuum can never exist for long; it is immediately filled with, what the Bible calls: "**poison**."

C. (:5-6) Abandonment by Their Impotent Idol = Golden Calf of Beth-aven

1. (:5) Its Ignominious Departure

*"The inhabitants of Samaria will fear
For the calf of Beth-aven. Indeed, its people will mourn for it, And its
idolatrous priests will cry out over it,
Over its glory, since it has departed from it."*

Biblehub: The people of Samaria will fear for the calf of Beth-aven -- Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, often associated with idolatry and rebellion against God. The "*calf of Beth-aven*" refers to the golden calf idol set up in Bethel, a city that became a center of idol worship. "*Beth-aven*" is a derogatory term meaning "*house of wickedness*," replacing "*Bethel*," which means "*house of God*." This reflects the spiritual decline of Israel. The fear mentioned here is due to the impending judgment and loss of their idol, which they wrongly trusted for protection and prosperity.

with its idolatrous priests—those who rejoiced in its glory -- The idolatrous priests, or "*chemārim*," were those who served at the high places and led the people in idol worship. They rejoiced in the glory of the calf, which was seen as a symbol of strength and fertility. This phrase underscores the corrupt religious leadership that led Israel astray, contrasting with the Levitical priesthood ordained by God. Their rejoicing was in something transient and false, rather than in the eternal glory of God.

Gary Smith: One of the main deceptions of their faith is the worship of the golden calf at Bethel (given the scornful nickname Beth Aven, "*house of wickedness*"). **Verse 5** describes the people's deep commitment to this idol. They worship in fear and trembling before this and other false gods. They and the false priests will mourn before the splendor of the golden image of Baal in some sort of cultic ceremony. This may be their final act of worship as the gold of the idol is removed so that it can be used to pay the tribute required by Tiglath-Pileser III, "*the great king*" (**10:6**). This removal of the glory of the calf god will demonstrate to all that it has no power and cannot defend itself. The people will be ashamed and disgraced because the true colors of their ugly wooden idol will finally be known. They have been fools to trust it.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The idol's "*splendor*"—that is, all the wealth of the sanctuary—will be taken away into exile (cf. **1Ki 14:26**; **Da 1:2**). This turn of phrase is ironic: Israel's true glory, Yahweh, will leave them (**9:11**), even as the empty glory of its idols will be taken. The sovereign God is leaving of his own free will; the idols and all the religious paraphernalia are to be carted away.

2. (:6) Its Shameful Destiny

- a. (:6a) Spoils of War – Hauled Off to Assyria
 *"The thing itself will be carried to Assyria
 As tribute to King Jareb;"*

James Mays: Such a fate is in store for the bull. In the days ahead the image will follow its trappings and end up in a caravan on the way to the court of the Assyrian king. The folly and uselessness of Bethel's bull will then be apparent. Ephraim will be left exposed to the disgrace of having worshipped a powerless fraud.

David Allan Hubbard: The reasons for Israel's dismay are described more fully in **verse 6**. The place of exile is pinpointed as Assyria (cf. **5:13**; **7:11**; **8:9**; **9:3**); the purpose of the deportation is stated as a '*gift*' (i.e. tribute; cf. oil as tribute to Egypt in **12:1**) to the

great king, i.e. the king of Assyria (see on **5:13**), who would be identified as Shalmaneser V at the time of the assault on Samaria and as Sargon II at the ultimate collapse (cf. **2 Kgs 17:3–6**). The grammar of the first line of **verse 6** is a bit awkward. It, i.e. the idol, is thrust into prominence at the beginning in a form that marks it as direct object. Yet the verb *shall be carried* is passive and hence would not ordinarily take an object. The syntax, strange as it is, is probably intentional. The calf-idol is highlighted for what it is – a thing, an object, a detestable artifact (cf. **8:5–6**). It has to be carried. What kind of deity is that? The contrast between the passive ‘itness’ of the idol and the active personhood of God (cf. the emphatic *he* as proper name in **v. 2**) has been drawn in bold colours.

b. (:6b) Shame for the Nation of Israel

*“Ephraim will be seized with shame,
And Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel.”*

Biblehub: **Ephraim will be seized with shame** -- Ephraim, representing the Northern Kingdom, will experience shame due to their misplaced trust in idols and foreign alliances. The shame is both a personal and national disgrace, as their religious and political failures become evident. Biblically, shame is often associated with sin and the realization of one's wrongdoing. This phrase highlights the prophetic theme of accountability and the consequences of turning away from God. The shame is not just emotional but also a public acknowledgment of their failure to uphold their covenant with God.

J. Andrew Dearman: Israel's plans had negative results, indeed catastrophic ones. The term “*plans*” (‘*ēṣā*’) is used similarly in **Ps. 106:43**, a poetic text with a number of connections to Hosea. In both places the term refers to plans undertaken by Israel in rebellion against YHWH's leading. In the context of describing God's anger and the resulting exile of his people (**vv. 40–43**), the psalmist notes, “*Many times God delivered them, but they rebelled with their counsel* (‘*ēṣā*’), *they sank down because of their iniquity* (‘*āwōn*’).” Hosea could not agree more.

D. (:7-8) Awful Consequences of Spiritual Apostasy

H. D. Beeby: The fourth strophe can best be understood as a partial summary of **Hos. 10:1–6** and as a conclusion which carries a strong air of finality about it. It must be confessed that the notion that here we have a rounding-off of the section does contribute a little to the interpretation, but this is preferable to the guesswork which might be the alternative.

1. (:7) Loss of Political Autonomy

*“Samaria will be cut off with her king,
Like a stick on the surface of the water.”*

Biblehub: **like a twig on the surface of the water** -- This simile illustrates the helplessness and inevitability of Samaria's downfall. A twig on water is easily carried

away by currents, symbolizing the lack of control and stability. This imagery emphasizes the futility of relying on political alliances or military strength instead of trusting in God. The metaphor also connects to the broader biblical narrative of judgment and redemption, where human efforts are insufficient without divine intervention.

John Goldingay: So the capital and its king are lost (vv. 7–8). They are being carried away “*like a twig*” in a stream. Ruin will also overwhelm “*the great shrine*” where the great heifer is located. Only here does Hosea use the word “*shrine*” (*bāmā*, conventionally “*high place*”), the term for local worship places, though he has likely had them in mind in some of his references to Ephraim’s whoring (e.g., 2:2–23 [4–25]). But here he is talking about Beth-el, which he likes to call Beth-aven. Beth-el is as significant for his Ephraimite hearers as Jerusalem is for Judahites. To call it a shrine, even a great shrine, looks like an insult. It implies that Beth-el is just a trumped-up version of one of those shrines that every town had. And as far as Yahweh is concerned, it’s the quintessence of Ephraim’s wrongdoing.

J. Andrew Dearman: Two primary options are apparent for the simile, either taking the noun *qešep* as a chip of wood, a piece of flotsam, or as foam, the frothy part of roiled waters that quickly dissipates. In favor of the first option is the LXX, which is followed by the NRSV and a number of commentators. These translators assume that if *qešep* is a chip of wood, then it is a homonym for the better-attested noun for “anger” or “wrath” (e.g., Josh. 9:20; Isa. 34:2). The latter option of foam, cautiously adopted here, takes the noun in its better-attested sense, but with the nuance of “*agitation*.” The phrase “*foam on the water*” allows for a subtle pun on the word “*anger*,” and can be readily related to Hosea’s expression in 13:11 that YHWH had given Israel a king in anger (*’ap*) and taken him away in *wrath* (*’ebrâ*). The intent of the simile differs little in either case. In metaphorical terms the tenor is **the sudden disappearance or end of Israel’s king**. The vehicle is the fleeting life of a wood chip on water or that of the foam on water produced by movement.

2. (:8a) Loss of Religious Pride – Luxuriant Vine Replaced by Thorn and Thistle

*“Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed;
Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars,”*

H. D. Beeby: If the calf is not present in v. 7, it is included in v. 8 among “*the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel*.”

Biblehub: **The high places of Aven will be destroyed** -- The term “*high places*” refers to elevated sites where the Israelites engaged in idol worship, often involving Canaanite deities. “*Aven*” means “*wickedness*” or “*iniquity*,” and it is likely a reference to **Bethel**, a significant site of idolatry in Israel. The destruction of these high places signifies God’s judgment against Israel’s persistent idolatry. This aligns with the broader biblical narrative where God consistently condemns idol worship (e.g., 1 Kings 13:2, 2 Kings 23:15).

thorns and thistles will overgrow their altars -- The imagery of thorns and thistles symbolizes desolation and curse, reminiscent of the curse upon the ground in **Genesis 3:18**. This suggests that the places once used for idol worship will become abandoned and desolate, overtaken by nature. It reflects the futility and ultimate end of idolatry, as these altars, once central to Israel's unfaithful worship, will be left in ruin.

Allen Guenther: The reference to *thorn and thistle* (**Hos. 10:8b**) echoes the curse on the first man's disobedience (**Gen. 3:18**). It signals more than corrective judgment in the form of loss of fertility. The very symbols of fertility (high places) and obedience (altars) become the place where chaos conquers the powers of Baal. That curse comes from the Lord.

3. (:8b) Lament of Desperation and Dread

*"Then they will say to the mountains, 'Cover us!'
And to the hills, 'Fall on us!'"*

H. D. Beeby: To be crushed to the death by falling rocks is a fate one would not choose; but, says the prophet, it is so much better than what God has in store that it becomes desirable, something to be prayed for.

Biblehub: **Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"** -- This expression of despair and desire for escape from judgment is echoed in the New Testament, specifically in **Luke 23:30** and **Revelation 6:16**, where it is associated with the end times and divine judgment. It indicates a recognition of inescapable judgment and a wish for annihilation rather than facing God's wrath. This phrase underscores the severity of God's judgment and the hopelessness of those who have turned away from Him.

Robin Routledge: The final part of the verse (:8) indicates **despair**. In the face of impending judgment, the people cry out for the mountains and hills to fall and cover them (cf. **Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16**), either to hide the shame of their actions or to avoid the horrors of coming judgment.

James Mays: Hosea depicts the **dread** of the time by quoting what the people will say (as in v. 3); they will implore mountains and hills to erupt in earthquake and cover them lest they be left in their nakedness to face the wrath of God (cf. **Luke 23:30; Isa. 2.10, 21**).

Trent Butler: Hosea concludes the description of punishment by noting the people's prayers not at high places but to the high mountains and hills. Such cries would not be cries for help and deliverance but cries for final destruction and escape from their misery. A people whose worship, religion, and politics were corrupt would find life was no longer worth living.

II. (:9-10) CRIME AND CHASTISEMENT

Derek Kidner: The name **Gibeah** (9) is doubly potent, linking Hosea's generation with the most vicious episode in Israel's past and with its aftermath, the destructive civil war of **Judges 20**. But **verse 10** appoints foreign nations, not fellow-Israelites this time, as the means of punishment. The fulfilment is recorded in **2 Kings 17:6** and, for good measure, **24-41**.

A. (:9) Crime of Persistent Sinning

"From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel;

There they stand!

Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity overtake them in Gibeah?"

J. Andrew Dearman: The events at Gibeah are cited to confirm that Israel continues to sin in a familiar pattern. . . past problems are a clue to Israel's current crisis and a harbinger of judgment to come. . .

The mention of *warfare* (*milhāmā*) and the gathering of predator nations fits the context of violence and destruction as portrayed in **10:2, 8**. . . Gibeah is the fourth of four cities to be singled out for comment. There is shame in Baal-peor (**9:10**), evil in Gilgal (**9:15**), fear and mourning in Samaria (**10:5**), and now sin in Gibeah (**10:9**).

Gary Smith: Hosea goes back to the events at Gibeah (**10:9**) to remind his listeners of the civil war that took place in **Judges 19–20** (see **Hos. 9:9**). Those events have blossomed into the sinful deeds surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite war, which also involved Gibeah (see **5:8**). Hosea sees the spirit of violence and immorality that existed in Gibeah as continuing to haunt Israel in his time.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Another parallel between the time of the fall of Samaria and the time of the Great Tribulation may be deduced by noting the similar condition of the respective groups to be judged by God. The phrase in **verse 9**, "*the days of Gibeah*" parallels the New Testament concept of "*the days of Noah*" (**Matt. 24:37**; cf. **2 Pet. 2:5**) in the sense that both speak of a period of unrestrained wickedness. Thus Hosea warns that the whole nation is standing like Gibeah of old, in a position that demands the judgment of God. The tenth verse amplifies the threat as God announces that "*the peoples*" (foreign invaders) will be gathered against Israel. This verse is again a parallel to the scene in Gibeah, in which the tribes assembled against Benjamin (**Judg. 20:1-48**).

Biblehub: **Did not the battle in Gibeah overtake the sons of iniquity?** -- The battle in Gibeah refers to the conflict that arose from the sin committed there, leading to a devastating war between the tribes of Israel. This serves as a warning that sin inevitably leads to judgment and destruction. The "*sons of iniquity*" are those who persist in their sinful ways, and the rhetorical question emphasizes the certainty of divine retribution. It serves as a call to recognize the seriousness of sin and the need for repentance, drawing a parallel to the impending judgment Hosea warns about.

B. (:10) Chastisement by the Rod of the Nations

*“When it is My desire, I will chastise them;
And the peoples will be gathered against them
When they are bound for their double guilt.”*

John Schultz: Israel’s sinful condition demanded a punishment that would satisfy God’s righteousness.

Biblehub: **I will chasten them when I please** -- This phrase indicates God's sovereign authority and timing in disciplining His people. The concept of divine chastening is consistent throughout Scripture, where God disciplines those He loves (**Hebrews 12:6**). The timing is at God's discretion, emphasizing His control over history and events. This reflects the covenant relationship between God and Israel, where disobedience leads to correction (**Deuteronomy 28:15-68**).

James Mays: Their punishment is already under way! The parallelism between “*I have come*” and “*peoples are assembled*” co-ordinates divine act and external public history. In the assault of foreign nations (“*peoples*” for foreign folk in **7:8; 9:1**) upon Israel Yahweh is the present acting subject. As the Lord of world history he assembles the nations to be the instrument of his chastisement of Israel (cf. **Isa. 10:5**). As the tribes rallied in assembly against Benjamin (**Judg. 20:1f.**), so the nations assemble against Israel. The old amphictyonic process for maintaining covenant order has been translated into the process of world history in order to chastise Israel for breach of covenant. If Hosea does have Saul’s kingship also in mind in the reference to Gibeah, the “*double iniquity*” could be the sum of the incidents in **Judges 19-21** and Saul (HAT, ATD). But Hosea may see “then” and “now”, the original deed and its subsequent continuation, as **two phases** which double the iniquity (BK).

Derek Kidner: As for the ‘*double iniquity*’, many suggested meanings have been offered. Among the most likely is that it refers to Israel’s resort to Baal in its worship and to worldly allies in its politics – both of which are major accusations in these chapters. Another is that the allusion is to their rejection first of God as their true king and then of David as His anointed. This double defection is implied in **3:5**, but that passage is hardly close at hand here. Further suggestions fasten on the reference to Gibeah just before this, and see the two sins either as those of Israel’s past and present, or else as the outrage of **Judges 19** plus the disobedient reign of Saul (who made Gibeah his centre). Some of these interpretations seem over-subtle, and it may be that the simplest of all should be followed: that like the ‘*three transgressions . . . and . . . four*’ of **Amos 1:3, 6**, etc., the two iniquities mean just the **repeated or persistent acts of Israel’s disobedience**.

Barnes’ Notes: “*their double sin*” -- as Jeremiah says, ‘*My people hath committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water*’ (**Jer 2:13**). This could not be said of any other nation, which knew not God. For if any such worshiped false gods, they

committed only one transgression; but this nation, in which God was known, by declining to idolatry, is truly blamed as guilty of ‘two transgressions;’ they left the true God, and for, or against, Him they worshiped other gods. For he hath twofold guilt, who, knowing good, rather chooseth evil; but ‘he’ single, who, knowing no good, taketh evil for good. That nation then, both when, after seeing many wonderful works of God, it made and worshiped one calf in the wilderness; and when, forsaking the house of David and the temple of the Lord, it made itself two calves; yea, and so often as it worshiped those gods of the heathen; and yet more, when it asked that Barabbas should be released but that Christ should be crucified, committed two transgressions, rejecting the good, electing the evil; *‘setting sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet; setting darkness as light, and light as darkness’ (Isa 5:20).*”

III. (:11-15) CONVERSION OR CALAMITY

Lloyd Ogilvie: There are three sections in **Hosea 10:9–15**.

- **Verses 9–10** cite Israel’s continued sin and the consequence of war;
- **11–13a** is Yahweh’s wistful reflection on what He had elected His people to be,
- and **13b–15** pronounces the forthcoming doom because of Israel’s denial of that election.

David Allan Hubbard: The general movement of the passage looks like this:

- Metaphor of past blessings (v. 11a);
- Threat of necessary discipline (v. 11b);
- Admonitions to responsibilities of their calling (v. 12a);
- Motivation to obedience (v. 12b);
- Indictment for disobedience (v. 13);
- Announcement of judgment with historical illustration (v. 14);
- Summary announcement-indictment (v. 15).

A. (:11-12) Election for the Purpose of Service

1. (:11) Metaphor of Trained Heifer

*“And Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh,
But I will come over her fair neck with a yoke; I will harness Ephraim,
Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: A **trained heifer** is one that has learned the task of threshing and is obedient to the guidance of the farmer.

Gary Smith: Hosea quickly changes metaphors in **10:11** to draw on his audience’s understanding of agriculture. He compares Israel to a **good heifer**, who was well trained and a hard worker at threshing time. God was impressed with this animal and wanted to make it his own (symbolic of his having a covenant relationship with the people). So he put his willing heifer to work plowing for him—an analogy that suggests God’s election of his people to do his service. At that time God exhorted his people (the heifer) to sow righteousness so that they could reap the blessings (the “*fruit*”) of God’s

steadfast covenant love (10:12). They needed to understand God's ways in the Torah, follow a path of justice, have unfailing love for him, and seek the Lord continually. God would then shower them with his righteousness. From the beginning he explained in the blessings and curses of the covenant that he would deal with them fairly and justly by giving them salvation if they would turn to him and seek to live according to the covenant relationship.

Unfortunately, Israel instead planted unrighteous seeds, and they will now reap a harvest of evil (10:13), just what they deserve. They have done exactly the opposite of what God has wanted, and the results are the opposite of what they want. Consequently, instead of eating the wonderful fruit of a righteous life, the people will have to swallow the poisonous fruit of their own deception. The lies and false beliefs they accept explain why the Israelites are being punished so severely by God. They have the opportunity to please God, they have the knowledge of what God expects of his covenant people, and they are aware of the consequences of their actions. God has chosen them, and all they need to do is to seek him and serve him with righteous living, but they reject God's way.

John Goldingay: With Judah and Jacob in parallelism, Jacob will refer to the Northern Kingdom (cf. **Mic. 1:5**). Plowing is stage one in the preparing of the ground for sowing, the breaking up of the hard earth; harrowing is stage two, the flattening and leveling of the ground (cf. **Isa. 28:24**). The parallelism implies that Judah and Jacob both plow and then harrow, not that the tasks are divided up. . .

Further, the farming process moves on from preparatory plowing and harrowing to sowing and reaping.

Biblehub: but **I will place a yoke on her fair neck** -- The yoke symbolizes subjugation and hard labor. God declares that He will impose discipline on Ephraim, transitioning them from a state of ease to one of servitude and difficulty. This reflects the impending judgment and captivity that would come upon Israel due to their disobedience and idolatry. The "*fair neck*" suggests beauty and strength, indicating that Ephraim's current state is one of grace and potential, yet it will be subjected to control and restraint. This is a prophetic warning of the Assyrian conquest, where Israel would lose its autonomy and freedom.

I will harness Ephraim -- The act of harnessing implies control and direction. God intends to redirect Ephraim's path, moving them from their self-directed ways to a path of divine correction. This reflects the broader biblical theme of God's sovereignty and His ability to guide nations according to His purposes. The harnessing also suggests a transformation from a life of ease to one of labor and submission, aligning with the consequences of their covenant unfaithfulness.

Judah will plow -- Judah, representing the southern kingdom, is depicted as plowing, a task that involves preparation and hard work. This indicates that Judah, unlike Ephraim, will be engaged in a more laborious and foundational role. Historically, Judah remained

more faithful to God compared to the northern kingdom, though they too would eventually face judgment. The plowing metaphor suggests a role in **preparing the ground, possibly for future restoration and blessing**, aligning with prophecies of a remnant and the coming of the Messiah from the line of Judah.

and Jacob will break the hard ground -- Jacob, representing the entire nation of Israel, is tasked with breaking the hard ground, a metaphor for repentance and renewal. This imagery suggests a **call to spiritual renewal** and the breaking up of hardened hearts. The hard ground symbolizes the stubbornness and sinfulness of the people, which must be addressed for true restoration to occur. This phrase connects to the broader biblical narrative of repentance and the need for a contrite heart, as seen in passages like **Jeremiah 4:3** and **Hosea 10:12**, which call for breaking up fallow ground and seeking the Lord.

Derek Kidner: The point about the heifer in the opening verse (11) is that threshing was a comparatively light task, made pleasant by the fact that the creature was unmuzzled and free to eat (**Dt. 25:4**) as it pulled the threshing-sledge over the gathered corn. This owner's pride in his beast, and his consideration for it (cf. **Pr. 12:10**), together with the creature's obedience and contentment, provides one of the many affectionate touches in these troubled chapters. There will be another with the same imagery of man and beast in **11:4**.

But the idyllic scene had to change. Perhaps we are meant to see that in any case there must be a transition to hard and testing work, in any worth-while enterprise and for any growth to maturity:

'Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered'. 'For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves' (Heb. 5:8; 12:6).

But in Israel's case (and Judah's, **11b**) the **hardship** was compounded by her retreat into obstinacy. *'Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn' (4:16)*. So the yoke of **verse 11** would no longer be the well-fitting one of God's ideal design, but the harsh, heavy collar of **slavery**.

2. (:12) Mandate to Repent and Seek the Lord

*"Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness;
Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD
Until He comes to rain righteousness on you."*

Biblehub: **break up your unplowed ground** -- This metaphorical language urges the people to **prepare their hearts for spiritual renewal**. Unplowed ground represents hardness and neglect, suggesting areas of life resistant to God's influence. In **Jeremiah 4:3**, a similar call is made to break up fallow ground, indicating repentance and readiness to receive God's word. This preparation is necessary for genuine transformation and growth in righteousness.

James Mays: The agricultural imagery allows for a marvelous portrayal of the mutual involvement of God and people in realizing the divine purpose. Canaan is the farm of Yahweh on which he set Israel to produce for him a harvest of righteousness and devotion that God's own righteousness might find its fulfilment in blessing the earth.

John Goldingay: Yahweh's challenge is for Israel to seek righteousness, mercy, and God himself. This takes us all the way back to the initial complaint against Israel, that it lacked moral integrity, compassion, and the knowledge of God (4:1). These three things describe the fundamental characteristics of life in God and also imply repentance from apostasy.

Trent Butler: Turning from metaphor, Hosea expressed his expectations clearly: **it is time to seek the LORD**. This was not to be a one-time happening but a continuous lifestyle, persisted in *until he comes and showers righteousness on you*.

B. (:13-15) Extermination and Destruction for Misplaced Trust

1. (:13a) Moral Failures

*"You have plowed wickedness,
you have reaped injustice,
You have eaten the fruit of lies."*

Biblehub: **you have eaten the fruit of lies** -- The fruit of lies refers to the deceptive practices and false beliefs that the Israelites have embraced. In biblical terms, eating often symbolizes internalizing or accepting something. This phrase suggests that the people have consumed and been nourished by falsehoods, leading to their downfall. Lies can refer to idolatry, false prophecies, or reliance on foreign alliances instead of trusting in God. This connects to the broader biblical theme of truth versus falsehood, as seen in **John 8:44**, where Jesus speaks of the devil as the father of lies. The Israelites' acceptance of lies has led to spiritual malnutrition and corruption.

James Mays: **Verses 11f.** are an interpretation of Yahweh's relationship with Israel throughout her history that shows what he expected. **Verse 13** states what happened. The contrast between expectation and result, between divine purpose and human performance, is quite like that created by Isaiah in his song of the vineyard (**Isa. 5:4, 7**).

John Goldingay: Actually, Ephraim has done its plowing (v. 13), and it's not the kind that the exhortation had in mind. Instead of faithfulness, Ephraim has plowed the opposite, faithlessness: failure to do the right thing by God or by other people (*reša*). In the community it has reaped a harvest of villainy or corruption. It has consumed the fruit issuing from the deception that has characterized the nation's politics (7:3) and that thus has an effect on its moral life. The words sum up the moral and relational failure with regard to God and to one another that Hosea has denounced throughout. The continuation of the denunciation in v. 13b implies that Ephraim's reliance on its own decision-making and on its human military resources is an expression of the faithlessness, villainy, and deceptiveness of its claim to rely on Yahweh.

David Thompson: in **verse 13** God describes what His own people have been doing and still are doing: There are five descriptions of what His peoples' lives were like:

1. They have plowed wickedness , not righteousness. **10:13a**
2. They have reaped unjust things, not just things. **10:13b**
3. They have eaten the fruit of liars , not eating the truth of God. **10:13c**
4. They have trusted in their own way, not God's way. **10:13d**
5. They have trusted in their own warriors and not God. **10:13e**

2. (:13b-15) Misplaced Trust Leads to Devastation

"Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors, ¹⁴

Therefore, a tumult will arise among your people,

And all your fortresses will be destroyed,

As Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle,

When mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.

¹⁵ *Thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness.*

At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off."

Trent Butler: **vs. 14** -- Israel refused to accept the identity God had for them. They would not meet the job description the Lord had outlined for them. God had to put on his judge's robes one more time and pronounce sentence upon his people. Their history began with war (**v. 9**). God had threatened war at his pleasure (**v. 10**). Now he described **the horrors of that nation-ending war**. Tumultuous sounds fill the air. Impregnable fortresses fall to the ground.

James Mays: Making military prowess a basis of self-confidence is a crime against Yahweh (cf. **Amos 6:13; Isa. 31:1**). The offence lies, not in the possession of armies, but in the trusting (*batah*), hoping to find one's security in them. . .

Vs. 15 – The devastation of Israel will come with similar horror. Yahweh will be the one who acts in gruesome devastation against these whose faith makes them secure against his judgment and independent of his power. **Autonomy** as a state in violation of their existence as the covenant people is "*the evil of their evil*". The king to whom the army belongs and who therefore incarnates their independence of Yahweh will be the first to fall. In the dawn's first light, when the battle has hardly begun, he shall be **cut off**.

Biblehub: **the roar of battle will rise against your people** -- This phrase indicates impending judgment and destruction. The "*roar of battle*" suggests a loud and overwhelming attack, symbolizing God's judgment against Israel for their unfaithfulness. Historically, Israel faced numerous invasions due to their disobedience, as seen in the Assyrian conquest. The imagery of a "*roar*" emphasizes the terror and chaos of war, reminiscent of other biblical passages where God allows foreign nations to discipline His people (e.g., **Isaiah 5:26-30**).

When the day dawns -- This phrase suggests an **impending and inevitable judgment**. The "*day*" often symbolizes a time of reckoning or divine intervention in prophetic

literature. It implies that the judgment will come suddenly and with certainty, much like the dawn that follows night. This imagery is consistent with the prophetic theme of the "*Day of the Lord*," a time **when God executes justice**.

J. Andrew Dearman: These last two verses conclude a subsection of the book. Their somberness reflects its dominant tone set in **9:10** with **Israel's waywardness**. Historical judgment, however, will not be the last word. The historical resume and divine soliloquy that follow in **ch. 11** show **YHWH to be at work not only in judgment, but also in redemption**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What kind of deceptions or misunderstandings are in our church today – undermining the sincere worship of the one true God?
- 2) How does the imagery of Israel as a luxuriant vine remind us to examine our own response to prosperity and the blessings of God?
- 3) How can we check ourselves to make sure that we are giving exclusive glory to God alone?
- 4) What does the process of plowing and breaking ground imply about all that is involved in the preparation for spiritual revival?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: **vv. 1-10** – A second image presents Israel as a **spreading or luxuriant fruit-bearing vine**, an image found also in other prophets (e.g., **Isa 5:1-7**; **Jer 2:21**; **Eze 15:1-8**). But the more the Israelites prospered, the more the people built altars and worshiped it like other nations (contrast the requirements of **Dt 12:1-7**). The Lord threatens to remove their false worship and their king, who may have led the way in such matters. This happened at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC (cf. **Hos 10:5-6**). Israel's kings made promises they didn't keep. They were to establish justice and righteousness in society, but instead their rule is like poisonous weeds. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel and the seat of power. Its people and priests do not fear the Lord but instead fear their calf-idol. But it too will be taken into exile to Assyria, along with Israel's king (**vv. 6-7**). Israel's idolatrous worship will be destroyed, and the people will then wish for death (**v. 8**). This will all be as punishment for Israel's sin, which has continued since the days of Gibeah. The double sin in **verse 10** may refer to idolatry and foreign alliances, or it may be a way of saying their sin is extreme (cf. **Isa. 40:2**).

vv. 11-15 – A third image presents Israel as a **trained heifer** that loves to thresh, separating out the edible grain from the plant. God will use all his people (Ephraim, Judah, Jacob) to prepare the ground so that they might sow righteousness and reap the fruit of unfailing love (cf. **Gal 6:7-9**). To seek the Lord is to seek a right relationship with him, a relationship in which one is gifted with his righteousness (i.e., salvation). This provides a beautiful picture of Israel's high calling. But the Israelites have rejected all this. They have sown wickedness and reaped evil and the fruit of deception. Rather than seeking the Lord, they have trusted in their own strength (cf. **Dt 8:10-20; Ps 147:10-11**). Therefore, the Israelites – particularly the sinful city of Bethel and the king of Israel – will be destroyed in battle. The devastation of Beth Arbel by Shalman (**Hos 10:14**) is not mentioned elsewhere but may refer to a campaign by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V.

David Allan Hubbard: The decision as to whether to divide **chapter 10** at **verse 10**, as we have, or at **verse 8**, as do numbers of commentators, is somewhat arbitrary. We have taken our clue from the key metaphors at **9:10; 10:1; 10:10; 11:1** and divided the text at those points. The argument for including the Gibeah section (**10:9-10**) with **10:11-15** is based largely on the **switch to direct address of Israel by Yahweh in the first person**. But there are no clear clues in the content itself to link **verses 9-10** more tightly with **verses 11-15** than with **verses 1-8** (but see **Stuart**, p. 167, for the suggestion that the two threats of war [**vv. 9-10, 14-15**] are an inclusio that tie **vv. 9-10** to **11-15**). If our division is correct, **10:1-10** pivots on two geographical foci – Bethel (called Beth-aven or Aven; cf. on **4:15**) and Gibeah (cf. on **9:9**) – just as the prior section, **9:10-17**, turned on the events at Baal-peor (9:10) and Gilgal (9:15). Hosea is keen on naming time and place in his documentation of Israel's history of sin. His conviction seems to be that Israel will understand neither the genesis of their rebellion nor its gravity **unless they will see themselves as extensions of their past**.

David Thompson: GOD EVENTUALLY WILL COMPLETELY DESTROY HIS OWN FAMILY MEMBERS WHO HAVE FAITHLESS HEARTS BECAUSE OF THEIR GREAT WICKEDNESS, SO THEY NEED TO IMMEDIATELY SEEK THE LORD.

Jason Van Bommel: **How Should We Respond When God Takes Away Our Idols?** If you belong to God and you give your heart to idols, you will find that your idols will draw your heart away from the Lord, or else the Lord, in love, will take away your idols.

So, if the Lord loves you, He will take away your idols, if you don't repent and surrender them first. Now, having the Lord take away your idols is a painful process. Hosea 10 describes it in graphic detail. A deeply rooted, dearly cherished idol is not one we give up easily. And when God takes it away, it disrupts and upends our entire lives.

Think about it: If your career is your idol, so that you find your self-worth and identity in your job and salary, you can either repent and submit your career to the Lord, or He may lovingly take it away from you. That would not be easy. Yet God has had to do

that for His people again and again, and it is something He does in love. Nothing can take His place in our hearts and lives without disastrous consequences.

Jeremy Thomas: Now the outline of **Hosea 10**. There are three cycles of accusation and judgment in this chapter: verses 1-3, verses 4-8 and verses 9-15. As you go through the sequence each one gets bigger, more is said as he goes through the cycles, so you have this gradual expansion. And the chapter is one sermon. Remember the book of Hosea is a compilation of several sermons that Hosea preached across his 50 year prophetic career. **Chapter 10** apparently was one of the last sermons he preached; it was given in the final hour of the nation when the nation was about to go under, and therefore he sounds a final warning about what is going to happen. . .

So, when God takes away our idols, we need to realize that we've been sowing to our flesh and we have been reaping corruption. We need to start sowing to the Spirit instead. That is, we need to start sowing righteousness. What does that mean? Hosea unpacks it: Break up the fallow ground and seek the Lord.

I. (10:1-3) Cycle of Accusation and Judgment Related to Wealth

A. (10:1) 3 Accusations

1. Israel is a luxuriant vine; He produces fruit for himself
2. The more his fruit, the more altars he made.

So here we have another improper use of wealth. They gave their money to the local fertility cult of Baal

3. The richer his land, The better he made the sacred pillars.

God put the nutrients in the soil, God made the land rich so it was productive and they took the gain and went down to the local market and bought all kinds of window dressing to dress up the sacred pillars. This is a capital improvement project that someone put together. You know that sacred pillar, we could make that look better. So they bought all kinds of ornamentation and decorated them up real nice, that's how they used the wealth.

B. (10:2-3) The Judgment Section

The judgment of vv 2-3 is that now God is going to destroy the wealth, the economy is going to go into recession

II. (10:4-8) Cycle of Accusation and Judgment Related to Covenant Breaking

Again there's a series of accusations here. This time they all revolve around speech, sins of the tongue, sins of dishonesty.

A. (10:4) 3 Accusations

1. Illustration from Business – Greed leading to broken contracts
2. Illustration from Marriage – Broken vows as mere words
3. Illustration from Political Alliances

B. (10:5-8) The Judgment Section

The judgment for this was they would go into exile to those with whom they broke the contract.

Leviticus 26 – 5 Cycles (or Degrees) of Discipline on the Nation of Israel for Covenant Breaking

1. (:14-17) Mass Neurosis
2. (:18-20) Major Loss of Capital Investment
National pride begins to break down; patriotism begins to wane
3. (:21-22) Ecological Imbalance; Nature will be upset
4. (:23-26) Outbreak of Mass Disease, Epidemics; particularly in the urban
Cultures / Also Deterioration of the Military Establishment /
Also Food Shortages and Malnourishment
5. (:27) Foreign Invasion / Making the Land Desolate / and Exportation
This is the level that Israel was at in the days of Hosea

III. (10:9-15)

A. (:9) The Accusation: Show how Gracious God Has Been in the Past and How the Nation has spurned that Grace; God always gives grace before judgment

B. (:10-15) The Judgment Section

TEXT: Hosea 11:1-11

TITLE: *GOD'S LOVING COMMITMENT TO AN UNGRATEFUL PRODIGAL NATION*

BIG IDEA:

COMPASSION AND MERCY TRIUMPH OVER JUDGMENT AS GOD CALLS HIS PRODIGAL NATION TO RETURN HOME DESPITE DESERVING EXTINCTION

INTRODUCTION:

H. D. Beeby: First, I have assumed that the chapter must be accorded some priority. It is the clearest statement of Hosea's central theme and as such provides a clue to the interpretation of the rest of the book. It also gives a convenient summary of the book's message. Second, I am confident that here we penetrate deeper into the heart and mind of God than anywhere else in the OT. Read aright (a most difficult task) and supplemented perhaps by **Isa. 52:13; 53:12**, this chapter takes us as near to the Father as it is possible to get without the direct leading of the incarnate Son. Like the Isaiah passage it announces what is the central biblical message of judgment/mercy, bondage/Exodus, destruction/construction, chaos/recreation, death/life, cross/resurrection, to name but some of the most prominent ways in which its central message may be expressed. **It is the message of descent from greatness followed by an ascent to comparable or even greater greatness.** This dominant scriptural motif has been called the "U" pattern because of the descent and ascent. The Hosea and Isaiah passages both exemplify it and at the same time point to the NT where the model is everywhere, but nowhere more perfectly presented than in **Phil. 2:5–11**. There Jesus (like the suffering servant) is hymned as descending, suffering, dying, and then rising to glory.

Derek Kidner: This chapter is one of the boldest in the Old Testament – indeed in the whole Bible – in **exposing to us the mind and heart of God in human terms.**

Duane Garrett: This chapter contains an oracle from Yahweh on the apostasy of Israel that draws heavily on two components of Israel's sacred history, Israel's exodus and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The first strophe, **vv. 1–5**, focuses on the exodus and ends with the warning that God will undo the exodus and send Israel to a new Egypt, Assyria, and into servitude to a new Pharaoh, the Assyrian king. The second strophe, **vv. 6–12**, concerns the possibility that Israel will become like the cities of the plain, that is, eternally annihilated. Yahweh recoils from this and promises a new exodus.

John Goldingay: [This section] opens by recalling the beginning of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, notes the contrasting way Israel has subsequently behaved, and declares Yahweh's resolve to attend to its wrongdoing. Amid these elements, it is distinctive for its metaphor of the father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel,

for its account of the tension within Yahweh over whether to punish or forgive, and for its vision of people returning to follow Yahweh.

David Allan Hubbard: God is the chief speaker of **verses 1–11** as he has been through most of **chapters 4 – 11**. Yet only in **verses 8–9** does he address the people directly. The account of his gracious treatment of them in their past history (**vv. 1, 3–4**), the accusations of sin (**vv. 2, 7**), the announcements of judgment (**vv. 5–7**), and the promise of future salvation (**vv. 10–11**) – these treat Israel in the third person.

James Mays: Yahweh's self-disclosure through the speech of Hosea reaches an unusual level of intensity and power in this chapter. **Anthropomorphism** is Hosea's stock-in-trade, but the portrayal of Yahweh as a father caring for a son achieves an explicit tenderness and detail unmatched in the Old Testament. Yet that portrayal is followed by a soliloquy of God which comes to a climax in the surprising disavowal, '*I am God, not man . . .*' Like a human father Yahweh loves his son Israel, but that love can and will bring salvation out of sin only because it is God who loves. The emotion and commitment of **love** is introduced as the basis and power of Yahweh's way with Israel; and a theme of revelation appears which finds its climax finally in the New Testament. In the oracle Yahweh surveys the entire life story of Israel as the son of God; and, as the story unfolds, the history of Israel becomes an astonishing witness to the very life of Yahweh himself.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Outline

- The Loneliness of Vulnerable Love (**11:1–7**)
- The Glory of God's Grace (**11:8–9**)
- The Norm of the Future (**11:10–11**)

The deepest level of loneliness is the anguish of **unrelatedness**, the disturbing realization of **separation** and **estrangement**. It is the pathos of longing to love a person and having your love resisted or rejected. . .

We often hear about God's grandeur and glory, His majesty and might. Don't miss His loneliness. It is one of His greatest attributes. True love is inseparably linked to vulnerability. When God created us to receive His love and to love Him, He became vulnerable to our rejection.

It is awesome to contemplate. Almighty God, lonely. Lonely for the rapture of our reconciliation with Him. The intimacy for which we were created—His heart and our heart made one again. He is lonely for those who pretend He does not exist, those who deny their family likeness with independence and pride, and those who say they belong to Him but resist trusting Him completely. You and I.

I. (:1-7) SPURNED GRACE RESULTS IN BONDAGE AND DESTRUCTION -- 5 ACTION-RESPONSE SEQUENCES CONTRASTING ISRAEL AND HER GOD

Allen Guenther: vv. 1-7 – Five action-response sequences contrast Israel and her God. Hosea develops these contrasts in a succession of family and travel scenes and in two scenes of war. The central sequence makes the transition from the family to war (11:4-5b). . . God's initiative is rebuffed by Israel (11:1-4). Later, Israel's initiatives are rebuffed or negated by God (11:5c-7). . . The passage moves from accusation (11:1-4) to judgment (11:5-7). The transition (11:4-5b) links this text as a unified whole.

A. Rejected Love

1. (:1) Action – God's Loving Initiative

*"When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son."*

Biblehub: **When Israel was a child** -- This phrase refers to the early stages of the nation of Israel, particularly during the time of the patriarchs and the Exodus. The imagery of Israel as a child highlights the nation's infancy and dependence on God. In biblical context, this period includes the covenant with Abraham and the formative experiences of the Israelites in Egypt. The metaphor of a child is used to emphasize innocence and the nurturing relationship God had with Israel.

H. D. Beeby: Israel's history begins with **election**, an election out of bondage because of **God's love**. Historically Israel's beginning was with the Exodus, which like every specific event had long roots in the past; but theologically the beginning was in love and in election. Israel would have had no existence without God's love and God's choosing. But this was no "love-child," where the "love" only accounts for the origin of the child; Israel's whole existence—present and future as well as past—depended on God's continuing love and the perpetual election expressed in Covenant. The chosen people live forever only with the patient, long-suffering love of God. The whole prophecy bears witness to this truth.

Duane Garrett: The metaphor of **Israel as God's son** is distinct from the earlier terminology (**Hos 1:10**) in which the text describes the people as Yahweh's children but describes the corporate nation, with its culture and institutions, as Yahweh's adulterous wife. Here the corporate nation is Yahweh's son. **Wolff** argues that the metaphor of "son" implies that Yahweh raised up and educated Israel.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: **Matthew 2:15** cites **Hosea 11:1** as "fulfilled" in Jesus. How can this be, if the allusion in Hosea to the exodus is retrospective and not a prediction? The answer is that in the gospel of Matthew the life of Jesus recapitulates the history of Israel in many ways. For example, paralleling the movement from bondage to Sinai, Jesus comes out of Egypt (**Mt 2**), goes through the waters (of baptism; **Mt 3**), is tempted in the desert (forty days and nights; **Mt 4**), and then goes to a mountain to speak of the law (**Mt 5-7**). **He is the true and ideal Israel**. The prophet recognized that the exodus offered patterns: it was a symbol of exile (**8:13; 9:3**) as well as a type for future hope (**11:10-11**; cf. **Isa 11:11-16; 51:9-11; Jer 23:7-8; Mic 7:15**). Matthew sees patterns in God's liberating initiative at the exodus, too; as God redeemed his

people from Egypt long ago, he now was accomplishing **a more glorious redemption** through Jesus, the greater Son (C. Keener, Matthew [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 106–9; cf. Garrett, 220–22).

J. Andrew Dearman: Matthew seeks to show that eschatological and messianic aspects of Israelite history are revealed in God’s Son Jesus and that this is in accord with Scripture and God’s prior activity in and through his corporate son Israel.

2. (:2) Response – Israel’s Idolatrous Response

*“The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Those who called could be the **prophets**. God repeatedly sent the prophets to charge “*them*”—that is, his people—but Israel turned its back and “*went away from them*” (Keil, 137; McComiskey, 184). This interpretation agrees with other passages that deal with the role of the prophets in the history of the nation (6:5; 9:8; 12:10, 13)

Biblehub: **But the more I called Israel** -- This phrase highlights God's persistent and loving call to His people, Israel. Despite their repeated disobedience, God continually reached out to them through prophets and His law. This reflects God's enduring patience and desire for a relationship with His chosen people. The calling of Israel can be seen throughout the Old Testament, where God repeatedly invites them to return to Him, as seen in passages like **Isaiah 65:2** and **Jeremiah 7:13**. This calling is a testament to God's covenantal faithfulness, despite Israel's unfaithfulness.

H. D. Beeby: The rebellion is emphasized by contrasting it with God’s love and election. God says “come,” and like Jonah they go. Not only do they separate themselves from him, but they answer to the call of the Baals and the idols. Theirs is not only a policy of avoidance; it is a positive policy of attachment to the gods of the land. Here there is the hint of a principle. Not only does nature abhor a vacuum; the same is true of supernature. To separate from God is automatically to be separated to idols. The atheist is an impossibility. All people are people of faith, and all that is in question is the object of faith.

J. Andrew Dearman: YHWH’s calling of Israel in vv. 1–2 was not simply a one-time event, even though it is founded on the historical redemption from Egypt. The term also characterizes an ongoing relationship between Deity and people, not simply the moment of choosing and acquisition. YHWH continued to call, i.e., to claim and to instruct, Israel. . .

Just as Gomer committed treachery against her spouse, so Israel violated its sonship through similar activities. Thus, whether it is treachery against marriage and covenant or rebellion against rescue and adoption, Israel is a serial offender against YHWH.

John Goldingay: As Yahweh continues to speak of Israel and Egypt (v. 2), he moves to speaking of both in the plural. The problem with the Ephraimites is that in more recent times they have been calling to the Egyptians for help (cf. 7:11), notwithstanding the fact that long ago the Israelites had escaped from the Egyptians! Further, despite the fact that Yahweh summoned them as his servant, they now serve other masters and look to them for blessing.

Allen Guenther: The second half of **verse two** clarifies the identity of those whose counsel they have been following. The baals and the idols characterize Israel's way of life. The child has accepted other masters (*ba'al* means lord, master, husband) and the dolls (idols) created by them. Historically, Israel turned to idols before Moses descended mt. Sinai (**Exod. 32-34**; esp. **32:8**). Even before they arrived at the Land of Promise, they had turned to sacrifice to Baal of Peor and other gods (**Num. 25**). What a fickle people!

B. Rejected Healing

1. (:3a) Action – God's Nurturing Care

*"Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;"*

Allen Guenther: A second form of rebellion roots in ignorance and ingratitude (**Hos. 11:3**). The forty years in the wilderness were special times of God's care. . . The murmurings and discontent which fill the pages of Exodus and Numbers stand as evidence of this ignorance and forgetfulness.

Gary Smith: **Verse 2** emphasizes how quickly the nation fell into apostasy. But like a loving parent, God did not immediately give up on his son. In the midst of this rebellion, he taught him how to walk by holding his hands so that he would not fall or go astray (**11:3**). This verse may refer to how God showed the people where to walk in the desert or to his guidance through the giving of covenant instructions in the Torah. Although God was not given credit for it, he also healed his son—a possible allusion to his intervention at places like Marah in **Exodus 15:26** (see also **Hos. 14:5**).

2. (:3b) Response – Israel's Spiritual Blindness

"But they did not know that I healed them."

M. Daniel Carroll R.: He "*healed*" them, perhaps an allusion to sociopolitical protection, material provision, or spiritual forgiveness (**Kakkanattu**, 54–57). Sadly, Israel refused to acknowledge (once again the key verb *yd* ') Yahweh's care.

J. Andrew Dearman: The tasks of instruction and nurture are described metaphorically as divine healing (*rāpā'*). This is one of five uses of the term in Hosea (**5:13**; **6:1**; **7:1**; **14:4** [**MT 5**]). In the first two instances, the physical aspect of healing is primary. In the third and fourth, YHWH's intended healing seems to apply to the alienated state of relations between himself and Israel. This usage is in view here in **11:3**. The shift of

names from Israel in v. 1 to Ephraim in v. 3 may have the benefit of a play between *'eprayim* and *rāpā'*. The two names for the people are used synonymously in vv. 1–3, but Ephraim allows for a memorable connection with the term for healing. Hearers, furthermore, may discern yet another reflection/allusion of the exodus and wandering narrative in this reference. In **Exod. 15:26** YHWH declares that if Israel heeds his instructions, none of the afflicting diseases of Egypt will be put on them, for “*I, YHWH, am your healer.*”

David Allan Hubbard: The last clause of **verse 3** indicates how intransigent Israel had become. They consistently misconstrued God’s intent to treat them in tender ways that would mend their hurts and thus display his love

C. Rejected Training

1. (:4) Action – God’s Loving Training

*“I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them.”*

J. Andrew Dearman: There are three reasons finally that favor the MT and the resulting **animal husbandry imagery**.

- The first is the limited parallels with **Isa. 30:28**, which refers to “*a harness on the jaws of the people*” (*‘al lēḥāyê ‘ammîm*), and **Hos. 10:11**, where Ephraim is referred to as a **trained heifer**.
- The second reason is the awkward parallel between YHWH and those who lift (*mērimê*, Hiphil pl. participle) an infant, if the imagery is parental. One would expect a parallel in the singular, perhaps even a reference to a father or mother embracing an infant, and the imagery of embracing to the jaws/face is not otherwise attested in Hebrew. Given the animal husbandry imagery (yoke), the comparison with those who care for an animal is more straightforward.
- The third reason follows from the first two: **cords and bonds** are also better understood as devices for animals, even when used metaphorically for people.

In summary, v. 4 completes the portrayal of YHWH’s love and calling of Israel begun in **11:1**, along with the subsequent sketch of filial failure against the background of divine guidance and care. The **training metaphor** serves the purpose of defining Israel as prepared from an early stage in the household to serve YHWH faithfully. The portrait underscores the personal, parental commitment of YHWH to them and thus the depth of their familial betrayal. YHWH’s portrayal of the people continues on in what follows, but the subject matter for the moment turns to the impending consequences of Israel’s failure.

Lloyd Ogilvie: Whether the image is graciously lifting a burden from a beast of burden and guiding its movements with gentle care or tenderly lifting a child in an embrace of love, the impact of this verse is the same. Yahweh gave Ephraim compassionate

attention and provision. And as He reflected on the past, the heart of God was stirred with loneliness.

Trent Butler: Change the image. Make God a rancher caring for farm animals. With a love beyond any feeling the animals have, God cared for his people. God used cords of human kindness. God did not force humans into obedience through divine sovereignty and power. Instead, he entered our world and placed human ropes on us to lead us as a farmer leads work animals to their task. These ropes were thus ties of love. God did not simply make work animals out of his people. God is like a farmer who knows the yoke has been too tightly attached to an animal's head or mouth, so he adjusts the yoke to make the animal more comfortable. When it says God bent down, it means he treated them gently. He provided everything the animals needed.

Duane Garrett: The term “*jaws*” here implies that farmers needed to adjust some kind of bit or harness device that either went into the animal's mouth or around its jaws. Hence the line describes an adjustment of the yoke and an easing of the burden, not a complete removal of the yoke. The point is not liberation from all duties but liberation from the harsh conditions Israel experienced in Egypt.

The last line of this verse, “*and bent down to feed them,*” probably could be better translated “*and gently I would give to him his food.*” Either way the point is that Yahweh fed Israel throughout the exodus, a fact that is well documented in the Pentateuch. The alert reader will recall how Israel complained about the lack of variety in the diet of manna, and in particular remember the episode at Kibroth Hattaavah, in which there was a plague after the people gluttonously consumed quail (**Num 11**).

Biblehub: **I led them with cords of kindness** -- This phrase reflects God's gentle guidance and care for Israel, akin to a shepherd leading sheep. The “*cords of kindness*” symbolize God's loving and patient approach, contrasting with the harshness often experienced under human leadership. In biblical context, this imagery recalls God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, where He led them with compassion and provided for their needs (**Exodus 15:13**). The cords signify not bondage but a tender connection, emphasizing God's desire for a relationship based on love rather than coercion.

with ropes of love -- The “*ropes of love*” further illustrate the depth of God's affection and commitment to His people. Unlike physical ropes that bind, these ropes are metaphorical, representing the bonds of love that draw Israel closer to God. This imagery can be connected to the covenant relationship God established with Israel, where love and faithfulness were central themes (**Deuteronomy 7:7-8**). The ropes of love also prefigure the New Testament revelation of God's love through Jesus Christ, who draws humanity to Himself through sacrificial love (**John 12:32**).

I lifted the yoke from their necks -- This phrase signifies liberation and relief from oppression. Historically, the yoke is a symbol of servitude and burden, often used to describe Israel's slavery in Egypt (**Leviticus 26:13**). God's action of lifting the yoke indicates His role as a redeemer who frees His people from bondage. This act of

deliverance is a type of Christ's work, who offers rest and freedom from the yoke of sin (**Matthew 11:28-30**). The lifting of the yoke also points to God's ongoing care and provision, ensuring that His people are not overwhelmed by life's burdens.

and bent down to feed them -- Here, God's humility and provision are highlighted. The image of God bending down to feed His people conveys intimacy and personal care, much like a parent nurturing a child. This reflects God's sustenance provided during the wilderness journey, where He supplied manna and quail (Exodus 16). The act of feeding is not only physical but also spiritual, as God nourishes His people with His word and presence. This anticipates the ultimate provision through Jesus, the Bread of Life, who offers spiritual nourishment and eternal life (**John 6:35**).

Derek Kidner: Every detail of this pampering drives home the extraordinary graciousness that Israel has experienced, far beyond anything that she had any right to expect, or any prospect of receiving at the hands of her new masters.

2. (:5ab) Response – Israel's Persistent Bondage

*"They will not return to the land of Egypt;
But Assyria-- he will be their king,"*

Trent Butler: Israel sought treaties with Egypt to avoid serving Assyria or being destroyed by the Assyrian army. God's plan was different. He proclaimed that the return to Egypt would not happen. Rather, Assyria would rule Israel. God explained his reason for pronouncing this sentence on Israel. Israel had refused to repent. Here Hosea speaks explicitly of repenting, but it is the purpose behind much of the preaching of the prophets.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: There is a wordplay on the verb *šûb*: Israel will "return" to Egypt, because it has refused to "return" to God (**5:4; 7:10, 16**). This sin of rebellion means that the nation's cities will be destroyed. Whatever the political and military plans might have been, they will not succeed (**v.6; cf. 10:6**).

Duane Garrett: The meaning is that the exodus will be undone and Israel will return to its former condition of slavery but that this time the captivity will not be in Egypt but in Assyria.

David Allan Hubbard: Yahweh's case against the wayward son (**vv. 1–4**) has issued in a guilty verdict. Now the sentence is to be pronounced:

- invasion (**v. 6**),
- exile (**v. 5**),
- and burdensome captivity (**v. 7**).

D. Retribution for Stubborn Rebellion

1. (:5c) Action – Israel's Stubborn Rebellion

"Because they refused to return to Me."

2. (:6) Response – God’s Demolishing Judgment

*“And the sword will whirl against their cities,
And will demolish their gate bars
And consume them because of their counsels.”*

Biblehub: **it will destroy the bars of their gates** -- The "*bars of their gates*" symbolize security and protection. In ancient cities, gates were crucial for defense, and their destruction signifies complete vulnerability and defeat. This imagery underscores the totality of the judgment that would leave the cities defenseless against their enemies. The destruction of gates is a common motif in biblical narratives of conquest, as seen in the fall of Jerusalem in **2 Kings 25:10**. It also serves as a metaphor for the removal of divine protection due to Israel's covenant unfaithfulness.

and consume them in their own plans --This phrase highlights the self-destructive nature of Israel's actions. Their plans, likely referring to political alliances and idolatrous practices, would lead to their downfall. This reflects the biblical principle that turning away from God leads to ruin, as seen in **Proverbs 14:12**, which states that there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. The consumption by their own plans suggests that their strategies, rather than providing safety, would result in their destruction, emphasizing the futility of relying on human wisdom over divine guidance.

H. D. Beeby: The sword shall rage and consume and devour because of Israel’s rebellion, which is deliberate and intended (**vv. 5c, 7a**); the yoke is to be fixed permanently, never to be lifted (**v. 7c**).

Trent Butler: As in **chapter 10**, **battle imagery** is used to describe God's judgment on his people. This has been prepared for by the previous mention of the king of Assyria. Here the imagery is taken to its final stage—the battle that finishes off the nation of Israel. God's love for his people finally turns to tough love that brings judgment, even though it is a love that lets him describe himself in terms of a loving, caring Father and in terms of a human farmer tending to his animals. Israel will have no more reason to boast of its wisdom, religion, politics, or political maneuvering. All plans will fail. Assyria will destroy Israel's political system.

David Allan Hubbard: “*their counsels*” -- Israel’s **wrong choices**, to which diviners may have made their contribution (cf. on **4:11–12**), were part of a persistent pattern of apostasy.

E. Refusal to Exalt God

1. (:7ab) Action – Israel’s Confirmed Depravity

*“So My people are bent on turning from Me.
Though they call them to the One on high,”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The last half of the verse is difficult but should be interpreted as consonant with the first part; therefore, it is best to take the meaning to be that even if

the people do call to Yahweh, the “*Most High*” (for this meaning of ‘*al*’, see comment on 7:16), he will not come to their aid. It is too late to cry out; with their hardened heart any such plea will probably be hypocritical anyway (cf. 6:1–3). **Judgment is well deserved and inescapable.**

H. Ronald Vandermeij: Do the people **repent** in the face of such an ominous prediction? The Lord answers this is His lament in **verse 7**, “*So My people are bent on turning from Me.*” The frustration experienced by the Lord and His true prophets in attempting to call Israel back may be summed up in that word *bent* (Hebrew, *tala’*), which means “impaled, addicted to, hung.” Truly, the nation was impaled on the hook of sin, and none was willing to exalt the Lord.

Biblehub: **Though they call to the Most High** -- This phrase suggests a superficial or insincere appeal to God. Despite their rebellion, the Israelites still engaged in religious rituals and called upon God, perhaps in times of distress. This reflects a common theme in the Old Testament where the people of Israel would turn to God in desperation but not in genuine repentance (**Isaiah 29:13**). The term “*Most High*” emphasizes God's supreme authority and sovereignty, a title that denotes His power over all creation (**Genesis 14:18-20**).

Robin Routledge: Because the people are firmly attached to ways that lead them away from Yahweh, their future has become uncertain. *Měšûbâ* is derived from *šûb*, continuing the prophet’s play on the term: the people refuse to repent (*šûb*) and instead embrace apostasy (*měšûbâ*).

2. (:7c) Response – God’s Recognition of Apostasy “None at all exalts Him.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: **We exalt God when we praise Him.** Praise is our response to God in the dialogue we call prayer. Our praises act like a thermostat opening our minds and hearts to the Spirit of God. They are our way of telling God that we love Him. And He is pleased. But when we squander our endowed ability to exalt Him on ourselves in pride or on false gods, He is lonely. It is like being a parent who taught his child to talk, but the adult child refuses to talk to him. Or, a lover whose beloved persists in a petulant silence. . .

Praying prayers of praise without ceasing is our cumulative friendship with God. It saves us from exalting ourselves, others, our culture, or an impersonal fate. All of life becomes a conversation with a Friend who wants to give us His best in all of life. Moment by moment, we check in with the Lord to thank Him and to receive His direction. We become life affirmers who believe that it is not the number of breaths we breathe but the number of breath-taking experiences each day offers. Open to life’s serendipities, we pray, “Alright, Lord, what are You going to do with this problem or potential? I believe You work all things together for good and Your glory. Now what’s next on Your agenda for me in this?” This quality of prayer keeps us open channels for what the Lord wants to accomplish in every situation. Instead of being thrown by

changes, we can throw ourselves into making changes according to His guidance. Authentic communion with God comes from this consistent companionship with God. **Ambrose of Milan** said, “No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.” Praise opens us to further blessings and more praise. **Andrew Murray** knew this, “To be thankful for what we have received, and for what my Lord has prepared, is the surest way to receive more.” Sin is ingratitude. Refusing to exalt the Lord follows. **John Henry Jowett** was on target: “Every virtue divorced from thankfulness is maimed and limps along the road.” But when we exalt the Lord, we are liberated from false pride and from imperious self-control. A thankful heart is the parent of authentic exaltation. We can enjoy our talents, the people around us, the opportunities that come our way, and the wonder of life much as we do the natural world, knowing that we did nothing to earn or deserve any of them.

II. (:8-9) HOLY COMPASSION MITIGATES GOD’S WRATH

A. (:8a) Divine Consternation

*“How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I surrender you, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?”*

Duane Garrett: Abruptly, Yahweh enters what can only be described as distraught self-questioning. Like a father who is at wit's end over what to do with a wayward child, Yahweh is here at a loss as he tries to resolve his compassion for Israel and the punishment demanded by their sin. . .

Zeboiim and Admah, together with Bela, were the other cities of the plain in addition to the more famous Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 14:2**). That is, these cities represent the depravity that God annihilated in the destruction that is recounted in **Genesis 19** and is recalled in **Deut 29:23**. One may fairly ask why the text mentioned the relatively obscure Zeboiim and Admah as opposed to the more famous Sodom and Gomorrah (contrast **Isa 1:9–10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46–56; Amos 4:11; Zeph 2:9**). Answering that question, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Hosea is at times deliberately obscure, elusive, and demanding of his reader. Certainly many of the problems in reading Hosea cannot be dismissed as scribal errors or even as obscurities that result from it being written in a northern dialect. This book is highly elliptical and allusive, and in this case it requires the reader to recognize the allusion to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by mentioning their far less famous sister cities.

H. D. Beeby: The theme that the mercy of God will always triumph over his severity is in a sense a return to the mood of vv. 1–4. On the other hand, it is quite unexpected, and in the light of vv. 5–7 it comes with the shock that any great reversal produces. Perhaps the startling nature of the affirmation is deliberately underlined by the change to direct address, as four times in v. 8 the father speaks to the son after only speaking of him in vv. 1–7.

Trent Butler: In his love God debates with himself about how he should deal with his lying people. . .

God faced a **crisis point**. He had to decide. Would he set himself up as the final judge and execute his people, or would he execute his plan of salvation? Would justice triumph in the divine nature, or would love? Here we see the depth of divine love as God himself struggles to avoid bowing to the overwhelming evidence and sentencing his people to death. Hosea pictures God arguing with himself. How could he possibly surrender his people to another nation that worshipped another god? How could he reduce them to the fate of being mere footnotes in history like Sodom and Gomorrah's satellite cities, Admah and Zeboiim (**Deut. 29:23**)?

Listen to the Father agonize over his beloved children: I raised you as a child. I taught you to walk. I put everything I have into you. I delivered you out of Egypt. I gave you the land. I gave you political power. I trusted you to be instruments of my salvation for the world. Oh Israel, what will I do with you? I ought to punish you. You deserve the death sentence. You have refused to answer my call to love and repentance. Instead you have answered Assyria's call to captivity. But how can I let you go? Compassionate feelings arise within me. My heart is changed!

J. Andrew Dearman: In formal terms v. 8 is a soliloquy. Hearers and readers are invited to listen to a presentation. In metaphorical terms, YHWH is an anguished parent, asking profound questions of himself, with the future of his people at stake. YHWH has historical experience in handing out punishment to the disobedient, but the matter of deserved punishment is overwhelmed by commitment to restoring the repeatedly offending child, whom we might call a “prodigal son.”

David Allan Hubbard: *Hand over* (cf. **Gen. 14:20**, where El Elyon is praised for turning over the enemies into Abram’s hand) and *give up* (cf. **1 Kgs 14:16**, where God promises to give Israel up for the sins of Jeroboam) have a long history in political-military transactions. They mean giving an enemy full right to do whatever the enemy pleases: **slaughter, exile, enslave, sell into slavery.**

B. (:8b) Divine Compassion

*“My heart is turned over within Me,
All My compassions are kindled.”*

Biblehub: **My heart is turned within Me** -- This phrase reveals the emotional depth of God's relationship with Israel. The turning of God's heart indicates a profound internal struggle between His justice and mercy. It reflects the divine pathos, showing that God's decisions are not detached or unemotional but deeply personal and compassionate.

David Allan Hubbard: *My heart* speaks of the anguish of God’s choice (cf. *heart* at **4:11**); as he faces the momentous decision, his thoughts and feelings have been ‘*turning over*’ (*recoils*) within him (cf. the distressed thoughts of ravaged Jerusalem, **Lam. 1:20**;

the same root *hpk* was used for the overthrow of the wicked cities; cf. Gen. 19:25, 29; Deut. 29:23), but, even more important, he reveals that ‘my sense of *compassion* (cf. **Isa. 57:18; Zech. 1:13**; the root *nhm* suggests a desire to comfort and console) has been growing exceedingly (see on *yahad* at v. 7) *warm*’ (cf. for Heb. *kmr* the pictures of Joseph’s warm feelings at the sight of Benjamin, **Gen. 43:30**; the prostitute’s yearning for the welfare of her baby, **1 Kgs 3:26**; and the starving people’s feverish skin in **Lam. 5:10**).

Gary Smith: Although we may understand some aspects of God’s just punishment of sin, we are much less able to comprehend the depths and extension of divine love and forgiveness to unworthy people. Holiness and compassion do not excuse seemingly irrational actions by God; they only reveal how the dynamics of the divine plan exceed the limitations of human rationality. The Holy One is so different, yet so compassionate.

C. (:9) Divine Commitment to Forbearance

*“I will not execute My fierce anger;
I will not destroy Ephraim again.
For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst,
And I will not come in wrath.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Reiterates Yahweh’s refusal to utterly destroy (*šht*) his people (v.9; cf. **13:9**). His anger, though fierce (cf. **8:5**), will not be given full reign. His is not the wrath of a human, who might seek revenge out of an extreme sense of betrayal. No, Yahweh is God. Judgment is not about exacting retribution; its ultimate aims are purification and restoration. The juxtaposition of vv.8–9 exemplifies the symbiotic connection between divine love and holiness, a theme that runs throughout the Scriptures and culminates in the cross of Christ.

Biblehub: **For I am God and not man** -- This phrase emphasizes the divine nature of God's actions, which are not bound by human limitations or emotions. Unlike humans, who may act impulsively or vindictively, God's decisions are rooted in His perfect wisdom and justice. This distinction is crucial in understanding the nature of divine mercy, as seen in **Numbers 23:19**, which states, "*God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind.*"

John Goldingay: Yahweh is God and not a human person. It’s natural for human beings not only to get justifiably angry at being treated faithlessly by offspring, spouse, or ally, but also to act on that anger. Yahweh is not bound by this logic. To sharpen the point, he is the sacred one. “Sacred” or “holy” is intrinsically a metaphysical term, not a moral one. It designates God as belonging to a different category of being, as a supernatural being. But other gods could be sacred or holy in this sense without their being inclined to faithfulness or mercy. The implication of Yahweh’s asserting his sacredness is to introduce a moral or characterological aspect to the definition of sacredness/holiness, as it applies to Yahweh over against other alleged supernatural or divine beings. It is as the sacred one that Yahweh does not allow the necessity of punishment to overwhelm the

necessity of being consistent to his own faithfulness in relationship or commitment; *hesed* is the word Yahweh could have used in this context. At this moment he does not intend to allow the necessity of punishment to overwhelm the necessity of faithfulness. As the section will go on to make clear, that decision is not final; it is subject to being rescinded if it continues to receive no positive response.

David Allan Hubbard: *The Holy One in your midst* is a remarkable summation of God's transcendence and immanence. As the Holy One he has all the power, glory and awesomeness that Isaiah sensed at his commissioning (**Isa. 6:3**) and that Jerusalem's citizens were to celebrate at the return from exile (**Isa. 40:25**). Yet that Incomparable One is present and at work among his rebellious people, disclosing to them his innermost feelings, pledging his compassion (**v. 8**) despite their disloyalty (**v. 7**). And he defines his otherness, his divine uniqueness, not in terms of power, wisdom, or sovereignty but in terms of love – constant, sure, steadfast.

Derek Kidner: Suddenly the fearful mechanisms of moral cause and political effect, of national guilt and judgment, of betrayal and estrangement, are interrupted by this passionate intervention, purely from disinterested love. No matter that the Lord may now seem wholly swayed by impulse and emotion: we are nearer a true knowledge of Him in such terms than in the bloodless definitions of theological philosophy. Elsewhere Scripture takes ample care of what such definitions seek to safeguard, but it never takes the warmth out of love, the fire out of anger or the audacity out of grace.

So the very thought of abandoning the people He has lived amongst ('*in your midst*', **9**), to an extinction like that of the cities of the plain, stirs God to strong revulsion. But how does this fit in with what in fact transpired? For Ephraim/Israel (the northern kingdom) fell in 722 BC and was deported to Assyria.

Lloyd Ogilvie: God is not vindictive. He is righteous in His judgments, remedial in His punishments, and indefatigable in His forgiving grace. His purpose and plan is for reconciliation. He would use the course of historical events of the Assyrian invasion, He would utilize the exile, He would persist in love for His people even in the exile, and He will bring His people back to the land.

All because God is the Holy One and not restricted by the quid pro quo of human nature. **Wolff** comments on this reference to the glory of God's grace as the Holy One.

“The motive clause states that God proves Himself to be God and the Holy One in Israel in that He, unlike men, is independent of His partner's actions. Remaining completely sovereign over His own actions, He is not compelled to react. . . . It is important to note that the concept of Yahweh's holiness, appearing only once in Hosea, provides the foundation not for His judging will but for His saving will, to which He had committed Himself from the very beginning of Israel's saving history.”

Robin Routledge: The portrayal of Yahweh as a father or husband, and even of one struggling with his emotions, may give us insights into his character, but he is not bound by those analogies and remains beyond any anthropomorphic representation of him. Here that freedom includes Yahweh's capacity to show mercy as well as to judge (cf. **Exod. 34:6–7**). This may be evident, too, in the title **Holy One**, which is particularly prominent in the book of Isaiah. 'Holy' in the Old Testament describes the essential character of Yahweh (cf. **Routledge** 2008a: 105–106) and points to **what sets him apart from humanity**. It may be linked with judgment, but, as the 'Holy One', Yahweh also offers salvation and redemption (e.g. **Isa. 10:20; 12:1; 43:3, 14; 48:17; 54:5**). Here, too, Yahweh is *among* his people, in their midst. This emphasizes his commitment to them and his unwillingness to allow them to come to ultimate harm. Sin makes judgment inevitable. However, consistent with the character of a holy God, judgment is intended to discipline, not destroy, and beyond it lies the promise of restoration.

III. (:10-11) FUTURE RESTORATION -- THE LORD SUMMONS HIS PEOPLE BACK AND SETTLES THEM IN THE PROMISED LAND

A. (:10a) Future Submission

"They will walk after the LORD,"

B. (:10b-11a) Future Summons

"He will roar like a lion; Indeed He will roar,

And His sons will come trembling from the west.

¹¹ *They will come trembling like birds from Egypt,*

And like doves from the land of Assyria;"

Trent Butler: So here God decides judgment cannot be his final word for his people. Love echoes a call across the nations to God's sinful, punished people. The call coming from God, the king of heaven, resembles that of a lion, the king of beasts. Earthly people cannot ignore the heavenly roar. The people hear and respond. They follow the LORD rather than walking away as in **Hosea 11:2**. They return, and God has a home ready for them.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: In **5:14–15** the divine lion devoured the people in judgment (cf. **13:8**). With that judgment over, Yahweh roars in regal power, and the nation will respond. Israel, once described as a silly dove that flitted to and fro between Egypt and Assyria, will come from their dispersion (**7:11**; cf. **9:3**). The One who punished and sent them away will settle them in peace to begin life anew with him.

Duane Garrett: This text envisages a general return of the people, not only from Egypt and Assyria but also from the west, the regions around the Mediterranean.

David Thompson: It is interesting that God specifically begins by saying that His people will come from the **west** because the United States happens to be geographically

located to the west of the land of Israel. Many Jews who have lived in the United States will stream back to the Promised Land.

John Goldingay: The tremblers will come from the sea, which in this context implies coming from Egypt; a diplomatic journey to Egypt would be as likely made by sea as by land (**Isa. 30:6** hints at the reason).

The next line (v. 11) makes explicit that Egypt is where the tremblers come from, and their returning all atremble will be a sign that they have given up their illicit diplomatic venture. Yahweh thus finally achieves his goal of delivering Israel from Egypt. They will equally give up diplomatic missions to Assyria and come back (implicitly trembling) from there too. There will be a neat reversal of Yahweh's earlier threats. He had threatened to stop them living in his land and have them live in Egypt and Assyria because that was where they looked to (**9:3**). Now they will come back from there with their tails between their legs. In a further colon that turns the line into a tricolon, Yahweh adds that he will let them live in their own homes.

C. (:11b) Future Settling

“And I will settle them in their houses,’ declares the LORD.”

Biblehub: declares the LORD -- The declaration by the LORD underscores the certainty and authority of the promise. It emphasizes that the restoration and settlement are acts of divine will, not human effort. This assurance is rooted in God's unchanging nature and His commitment to His people. The phrase reinforces the prophetic nature of the message, affirming that what God has spoken will surely come to pass. It also connects to the broader biblical narrative of God's sovereignty and His plan for redemption throughout history.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do we spurn the grace of God in our lives?
- 2) Why does Israel persist in the pattern of failing to appreciate the love and nurturing provided by God?
- 3) What type of emotions are experienced by God when His people reject His loving care and replace loyal love with idolatry?
- 4) When do we fail to exalt the Lord as we should?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Andrew Dearman: Thus ends a second major section of the book. **Hosea 11:1–11** parallels **3:1–5**, the conclusion of the first section. **Hosea 3:1–5** presupposes failure on the part of the adulterous woman; **11:1–11** that of the recalcitrant son. Discipline and restoration are depicted for woman and child. In neither case does the impetus for restoration come from the offenders, but from YHWH, who cannot let them go.

Anthony Petterson: A fourth image represents Israel as God's son and reveals the depths of God's love for his people (cf. **Ex 4:22–23**). God's love was first seen in his election of Israel and his salvation in the exodus (cf. **Dt 7:6–8**). But the people of Israel were idolatrous from the beginning (cf. **Ex 32**). As a parent, God was closely involved in teaching them, but they did not appreciate his kindness. God even stooped down, showing his affection and love as one does to a little child. But the Israelites have been a rebellious child. Because they refuse to return in repentance, they will return to Egypt (cf. **Hos 8:13; 9:3, 6**) and be ruled by Assyria (cf. **5:13**). The Assyrian army will flash their swords in conquest through the Israelite cities. While God calls Israel his people, the relationship has broken down because they have turned from God. With raw emotion, God reveals that he cannot destroy the nation as they deserve. Admah, and Zeboyim were cities that were completely destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah (**11:8; Ge 10:19; 14:2, 8**). God's compassion constrains his anger so that Ephraim will not be completely destroyed (cf. **Ex 34:6–7**). God's holiness sets him apart from human beings, so he can act to renew the broken relationship. Though Israel has failed to be the kingdom of priests and the holy nation it was called to be (**Ex 19:6**), after God judges his people in exile, he will act to save and restore them to their homes. Earlier images of God as a destructive lion (**5:14**) and Israel as a senseless dove (**7:11**) are reversed. The compassion and justice of God come together perfectly in the cross of Jesus Christ (**Ro 3:21–26**). Jesus is the faithful Son of God (**Mt 2:15**).

Duane Garrett: Excursus: The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15

In the context of **Hosea 11, v. 1** plainly concerns the exodus from Egypt. **Matthew 2:15**, however, asserts that Jesus fulfilled this verse when the holy family returned from Egypt after the death of Herod: “*And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’*” One cannot but wonder, therefore, whether Matthew has wrenched **Hos 11:1b** from its context and applied it gratuitously to Jesus. Or, to put it in perhaps gentler terms, whether Matthew has engaged in a bit of midrashic exegesis, reading back into the text something that is not really there but which might nevertheless be justified on theological grounds.

It is noteworthy that Matthew chose a translation that reflects the Hebrew text over against the LXX, which reads, “*And out of Egypt I called his children.*” Assuming he was aware of the LXX, Matthew's choice of the Hebrew reading over the Greek must be regarded as deliberate. . .

Many interpreters observe that the idea that Jesus fulfilled **Hos 11:1** corresponds to the typology that one finds throughout Matthew, in which Jesus recapitulates the story of

Israel. Jesus was forty days in the wilderness, just as Israel was there for forty years. Jesus gave his law on a mountain, just as God gave the Torah at Sinai. Jesus miraculously fed his followers in the wilderness, just as Moses gave the people manna. As such it hardly is surprising that Matthew could see a parallel between Jesus' departure from Egypt and the striking line of Hosea, "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" The benefit of this approach to Matthew, aside from the fact that it fits not only with this passage but with the whole of his gospel, is that it does not require us to suppose Matthew was unaware of or sought to obscure the Old Testament context of **Hos 11:1**. To the contrary, for Matthew to have asserted that Jesus, in his return from Egypt, recapitulated the exodus experience, of necessity requires that Matthew understood the context and original meaning of **Hos 11:1** to be Israel's exodus. Nevertheless, although this approach to the text of Matthew is in my view correct, it still leaves one wondering whether Matthew has rightly appropriated **Hos 11:1** or has simply applied his hermeneutic to the Old Testament verse.

One can always appeal to *sensus plenior* (Latin, "**fuller meaning**"), the hermeneutical principal that says that Old Testament writers sometimes wrote better than they knew because the Holy Spirit led them to use vocabulary that had a significance of which the writers themselves were unaware. This aspect of inspiration, while helpful if used carefully, actually fails to resolve the fundamental question of whether Matthew has rightly made use of Hosea. To say that God caused Hosea to frame his words in such a way that Matthew could appropriate them does not tell us anything about whether the text of **Hos 11:1** really has anything to do with the Messiah's return from Egypt.

To put it more pointedly, **did Hosea suppose that this verse looked ahead to the Messiah?** It is, of course, difficult if not impossible to show that Hosea intended readers to discern from this passage that the Messiah would come out of Egypt. This question, however, is the wrong question to ask of **Hos 11:1**. The real issue is not, Did Hosea intend this verse to be read messianically? but **What did Hosea understand to be the nature of prophecy?** In answer to this question, we must assert that Hosea, like all biblical prophets, saw prophecy not so much as the making of specific, individual predictions (which are actually quite rare among the writing prophets), but as the **application of the Word of God to historical situations**. In doing this the prophets brought to light certain **patterns** that occur repeatedly in the relationship between God and his people. These patterns or themes have **repeated fulfillments** or manifestations until the arrival of the final, absolute fulfillment. Thus, for example, the conquest of the land "*fulfilled*" the promises to the patriarchs but did not fulfill those promises finally or in their ultimate form. The inheritance of the "*new earth*" is the ultimate conclusion of this prophetic theme. All of the prophets were, to some degree, "*like Moses*" (**Deut 18:5**), but the ultimate prophet like Moses can only be the Messiah. Each of the kings of the line of David was a fulfillment of the promise that God would build him a "*house*" (**2 Sam 7**), but **the Messiah is again the final fulfillment of this theme**. Thus prophecy gives us not so much specific predictions but **types or patterns by which God works in the world**. We need look no further than **Hosea 11** to understand that Hosea, too, believed that God followed patterns in working with his people. Here the slavery in Egypt is the pattern for a second period of enslavement in an alien land (**v. 5**),

and the exodus from Egypt is the type for a new exodus (vv. 10–11). Thus the application of **typological principles** to **Hos 11:1** is in keeping with the nature of prophecy itself and with Hosea's own method. Understood in this way, we can regard the wording of **Hos 11:1** not as fortuitous but as a work of God. **Whether or not Hosea himself understood the ultimate fulfillment of his words, he knew that his words had significance that transcended his own time.** We should note, however, that the surprising shift of metaphor from Israel as mother and children to Israel as son gives us further reason to regard this as **a deliberate move** and not as happy coincidence.

Robin Routledge: Here, as in the preceding sections, Israel fails to live up to early expectations. And, as before, the consequence is divine judgment. However, that judgment is tempered by grace, and there is also the hope of restoration. Like the prodigal in Jesus' parable, the son, despite the father's care, wanders away. But the hardship that accompanies judgment is educative; its purpose is to bring the people to their senses. The loving commitment of the divine parent will not finally let them go. This imagery gives a profound insight into the tension within Yahweh's heart: between the judgment that Israel's sin and rebellion demand, and the divine compassion that, for all their apostasy, will not give his people up. That tension is resolved ultimately in the cross, where judgment on sin falls, but where the way is open for sinners to be forgiven.

Gary Smith: The totality of **divine love** is not systematically explained in the limited context of **Hosea 11**, but one does learn that God's love is not totally quenched by human failures or disloyalties (**11:8**). God loved his people when they were few in number (**Deut. 7:7–8**), and he graciously gave them the land of Israel in spite of their stubbornness (**9:4–6**). God's acts of love were regulated by his choices (**7:7**), his promises (**7:8; 9:5**), and his faithfulness to his covenant (**7:9**); they were not based on Israel's goodness or acceptance of a few religious ceremonies. His love is a spontaneous force that has no justification or rationale; it is an inexplicable mystery whereby God relates his grace, compassion, and commitment to people. **First John 4:16** summarizes this point by saying, "*God is love.*"

David Thompson: As we have journeyed through the first ten chapters of Hosea, we have seen a theme which has been primarily **the persistent disobedience of God's people leads to the authorized punishment of God.** But now as we come to the final four chapters of Hosea, we see a most amazing series of chapters that all focus in one way or another on the **unconditional love of God for His people.**

Unconditional love is hard to define. The simplest definition would be that unconditional love is a love that is given without any conditions. It is not more or less influenced by anything or anyone. Unconditional love is not regulated by anything. In other words, God simply chooses to love an object regardless of what it is or does. In unconditional love God sovereignly chooses to love someone or something without any strings attached.

Now in all reality, **Hosea is the great prophet of unconditional love.** He chose to love Gomer when there was nothing about Gomer worth loving. God made him marry an

unfaithful harlot to illustrate a point about Him and Israel.

Now we must admit that as we have gone through this book of Hosea to this point, there is nothing we have seen that would merit the love of God. In fact, we have seen plenty that has merited the anger of God and the hate of God. So when we come to the final chapters of the book of Hosea and God says, “Because I love you, I am going to do wonderful things for you,” we know this is certainly not what is deserved.

In **Hosea 11** what we see is this:

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT GOD’S PEOPLE KEEP TURNING AWAY FROM HIM TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE WILL NOT GIVE THEM UP AND WILL ULTIMATELY BRING THEM INTO A WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM BECAUSE HE LOVES THEM.

As God’s people, we at times are real mess-ups. Our entire relationship with God is based on His grace. We do not deserve the forgiveness of God. We do not deserve the love of God. We do not deserve the blessings of God. God says this is what I am going to do for you regardless of this reality. God says you have turned away from me as an adulterer time and time again and **yet I will love you anyway**. You have failed me and sinned against Me and yet I will love you anyway. You have refused to get serious about Me and My Word and yet I will love you anyway. That is unconditional love and that is the love that is developed in the final chapters of the book of Hosea.

TEXT: Hosea 11:12 – 12:14

TITLE: CONDEMNING DECEIT, FALSE CONFIDENCE AND A MANIPULATING SPIRIT

BIG IDEA:

INDICTED FOR SPIRITUAL AND MORAL UNFAITHFULNESS, GOD'S ELECT NATION FACES DIVINE RETRIBUTION DESPITE THE CALL FOR REPENTANCE AND HOPE OF ULTIMATE RESTORATION DUE TO GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE

INTRODUCTION:

H. D. Beeby: **ch. 12** stands at the beginning of the fourth and final section, which culminates in the hopeful **ch. 14**, with which the book ends.

Allen Guenther: The first unit (**12:11-14**; Heb. **12:12-15**) is notoriously difficult. Perhaps Hosea's very artistry creates the problems for the modern exegete. He delights in **repetition of words and sounds**:

<i>Gil'ad – bagilgal – kegallim</i>	Gilead – in Gilgal – like piles
<i>zibehu – mizbehotam</i>	they sacrifice – their altars
<i>saday – sedeh</i>	[furrows of the] field – field [of Aram]
<i>be'issah – be'issah</i>	for a wife – for a wife
<i>samar – nismar</i>	he tended/remained – he was tended/guarded
<i>benabi' – benabi'</i>	by a prophet – by a prophet
<i>he'elah – 'alayw</i>	[Yahweh] brought up – upon him

Worship dominates this text unit. In God's economy, the prophetic religious model stands in stark contrast to Israel's preoccupation with the cult, represented by sacrifices and festivals. Focus on the cult fails to direct Israel to the truth regarding God and itself. If the nation is to survive, it must return to the guidance given through Moses.

James Ward: [Proposes the following structure: sees the chapter consisting of five poems, each one having two parts:]

The first part is an accusation, or sarcastic recollection, consisting of from two to four lines. The second part is a **threat**, and is always stated in a single line. This last feature of the poems is actually the clue to the structure of the chapter.

It can hardly be accidental that the chapter has one-line threats occurring at such regular intervals. Each threat is logically dependent upon what precedes it.

The five poems are: 11:12 – 12:2; 12:3–6; 12:7–9; 12:10–11; 12:12–14.

ChatGPT: God's steadfast love for Israel contrasts with their unfaithfulness, but His divine discipline will lead to eventual restoration, calling them to repentance and faithfulness.

I. (11:12 - 12:6) ESCAPING DIVINE RETRIBUTION REQUIRES A SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AFTER THE PATTERN OF DECEITFUL JACOB

A. (11:12 – 12:2) Dispute with Deceitful Israel (and Judah)

Duane Garrett: The decision to regard 11:12 [Hb. 12:1] as the end of the previous text and 12:1 [Hb. 12:2] as the beginning of a new text requires some explanation. One could make the case that 11:12 begins the next section and that Yahweh's oracle closes at 11:11. It certainly seems that 11:12 leads into 12:1. On the other hand, some interpreters place a major break between 12:1 and 12:2. Thus, one could argue that 11:12 and 12:1 go with 12:2ff., or that they both go with 11:1–11, or that 11:12 – 12:1 are a separate unit unto themselves. But one should not put a major break between 12:1 and 12:2. Although the English at the beginning of 12:2 (*“The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah”*) sounds as though it begins a new section, the Hebrew does not bear this out; 12:1 belongs with 12:2. Furthermore, 11:12 is plainly spoken by Yahweh, which implies that it belongs with 11:1–11. In addition 11:12 returns to the idea of worshiping God under the names *’ēl* and *“holy ones,”* which links it to 11:7 and 11:9. Hosea 12:1–8, however, is spoken by Hosea and not Yahweh (see 12:2). Thus a major break after 11:12 is unavoidable. On the other hand, as one often sees in the Book of Hosea, 11:12 is **transitional** in that it also leads into 12:1. That is, at 12:1 Hosea begins by responding to Yahweh's previous words.

In this text Hosea picks up where Yahweh breaks off, at the apostasy of Ephraim and Judah (vv. 1–2). That is, vv. 1–2 declare that both the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim, v. 1) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah, v. 2) are guilty of apostasy. After that Hosea reflects upon Israel's ways in light of the story of Jacob (vv. 3–8), just as Yahweh had reflected on the current condition of Israel in light of the exodus event and the story of the destruction of the cities of the plain.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The difficulties begin with 11:12. It is necessary to decide whether it belongs conceptually with **ch. 11**, whether the message of 11:11 extends through 12:1 (NEB, NRSV), or whether 11:12 more appropriately goes with what follows (e.g., NIV). This commentary concurs with the last option; 11:11 ends with *“declares the LORD,”* closing the major section that stretches from 4:1 through that verse. Clearly, the MT reckoned 11:11 to be a **conclusion**, as it is followed by the paragraph marker *sāmek*.

Hosea 11:12 – 12:2 serves as a general introductory indictment for which the following verses provide details. These verses could communicate the words of either Yahweh or the prophet. The fact that **12:1–8** uses third-person references for God inclines me to the latter option, but the message remains the same.

1. (11:12) Indictment of Israel and Judah

a. Indictment of Israel for Lies and Deceit

*“Ephraim surrounds Me with lies,
And the house of Israel with deceit;”*

Gary Smith: **Hosea 11:12** in the English Bible is **12:1** in the Hebrew Bible. The common theme throughout **11:12 – 13:3** is the **deceitfulness of Israel**. Like an untruthful spouse who lies about her loyalty to her husband, Israel has been deceitful with God. To emphasize this deceit, Hosea contrasts the many gracious things that God has done for his people with their repeated unfaithfulness to him. These are marked by sudden changes, such as “*but you*” (**12:6**), “[*but*] *I*” (**12:9**), “*but Ephraim*” (**12:14**), and the “*therefore*” clauses in **13:3**.

Allen Guenther: Ephraim’s national and international policies are ringed with deceit. Social havoc and lies increase. These further feed distrust, create violence, and disrupt normal life. In desperation, the nation pursues survival as its primary goal. That goal is ephemeral. Like the dry east wind from the desert, representing Assyria, it brings only sterility and death.

b. Indictment of Judah for Apostasy

*“Judah is also unruly against God,
Even against the Holy One who is faithful.”*

Robin Routledge: Both kingdoms share the failings of their common ancestor. The consequence, which repeats the language of **4:9**, will be repayment (*šûb*) in divine punishment for their attitudes and actions.

Duane Garrett: **Verse 12b** is subject to various interpretations. The NRSV, for example, renders it, “*But Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One,*” thus taking this to be a positive assessment. The NIV, however, is correct to read this as **a criticism of Judah** that parallels the criticism of Ephraim in **v. 12a** (and see especially the assessment of Judah in **12:2a**). It appears, however, that a more accurate translation would be “*and Judah still wanders with deity, and is faithful with the holy gods.*” The word here translated “*deity*” is *’ēl*, also the name of the high god of the Canaanite pantheon. The word can, in a proper context, be used of the one God, Yahweh. To “*wander*,” however, implies apostasy. Judah wanders off into the religious worship of *’ēl*, perhaps using the justification that *’ēl* is merely another term for Yahweh. This generic and semi-pagan term, however, invites a pagan interpretation. Judah is also faithful to the “*holy ones*,” a term that might also be used of Yahweh but that in a context such as this is better taken to refer to pagan gods. Thus the text

portrays Judah as **wavering in its devotion to Yahweh**. They worship Yahweh under names that might be associated with orthodox Yahwism but which already indicate a turning away into the language of the Canaanite cults. What is important here is the ambiguity of this half-verse, an ambiguity that leads to two opposing translations asserting either that Judah is faithful or that Judah is apostate. We should maintain this sense of ambiguity. In “*wandering with*” ’ēl, Judah is wavering in and out of orthodox Yahwism through the worship of God under ambiguous names.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: I take the verb in a **negative** sense (“*is unruly against*,” NASB, NIV; **Keil**, 144–45; **Stuart**, 185; cf. **Jer 2:31**). The condemnation of Judah parallels that of Israel.

2. (12:1) Ideology of Futility

a. Futile Activities

1) Attempting to Feed on Emptiness

“Ephraim feeds on wind,”

Biblehub: **Ephraim feeds on the wind** -- This phrase symbolizes the futility and emptiness of Ephraim's (representing the northern kingdom of Israel) pursuits. In biblical literature, “*wind*” often signifies something transient and insubstantial. The imagery suggests that Ephraim is engaging in activities that are ultimately unproductive and meaningless. This can be connected to **Ecclesiastes 1:14**, where the pursuit of the wind is equated with vanity.

Gary Smith: Israel is pursuing the wind (**12:1**). By going after something that is illusive and without substance, she shows her stupidity and the uselessness of her quest. Her devotion to futile hopes is strong (she does it “*all day*”), but in the process she only “*multiplies lies*.” Another example of this futile action is Israel’s pursuit of treaties with Assyria and at the same time giving expensive gifts to Egypt to confirm a political relationship with her (**12:1b**). These nations will not give Israel protection and security; trusting them makes about as much sense as chasing the wind.

J. Andrew Dearman: No one can **shepherd the wind**. It is folly, for the wind cannot be controlled or guided. That apparently is one point of the prophetic sarcasm in **v. 1a**. It is just as stupid to follow the east wind, which all people in the eastern Mediterranean hope to avoid, since it comes off the desert as a hot and dry scourge. So much for the good sense of Ephraim! Modern proverbial sayings such as “she is playing with fire” or “he has a tiger by the tail” are intended, like Hosea’s shepherds the wind (cf. **8:7**), to indicate **fruitless and potentially harmful activity**. Indeed, “*lies and violence*” are the product of Ephraim’s efforts, which are further identified with political engagements.

2) Attempting to Pursue Destructive Ends

“And pursues the east wind continually;”

Biblehub: **and pursues the east wind all day long** -- The “*east wind*” in the Bible is often associated with destruction and desolation, as seen in **Genesis 41:6** and **Exodus**

10:13. By pursuing the east wind, Ephraim is depicted as chasing after **destructive and harmful endeavors**. This reflects their **misguided alliances** and reliance on foreign powers rather than trusting in God.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The risk of Israel's deceptive diplomacy is likened by Hosea to pursuing the east wind, a reference to the dry, searing sirocco winds that blow from the eastern deserts across Palestine's coastal regions. Assyria, like the blast from the sirocco, is not Ephraim's friend, but an uncontrollable power that will mercilessly consume all that stands before its fiery rage. Whereas it was hazardous to make a covenant with the east wind (**2 Kings 17:3**), an even greater danger was created when that covenant was broken (**2 Kings 17:4-6**). Ephraim had deceived the wicked sirocco, a deception that would spell disaster as the enraged east wind swept over the land.

John Schultz: Pursuing the east wind is the ultimate picture of meaninglessness and destruction. King Solomon uses it as an image of futility. Giving account of his exploits in Ecclesiastes, he states: "*Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.*"

b. Futile Political Maneuvering
"He multiplies lies and violence."

James Mays: In dealing with Ephraim Yahweh finds himself in the midst of a folk who practise treachery and evade truth. Deceit (*kahas*) is a primary feature of Israel's unfaithfulness (**7:3; 10:13**; cf. the verb in **4:2; 9:2**). In this text it could refer to the nation's political policy of seeking a solution for their danger by manoeuvring between Assyria and Egypt (**12:1**). Probably the general terms "*deceit*" and "*falsehood*" are illustrated by the conduct described in v. **12b**.

c. Futile Political Alliances
*"Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria,
And oil is carried to Egypt."*

Biblehub: **and sends olive oil to Egypt** -- Sending olive oil to Egypt signifies attempts to secure alliances and favor with another powerful nation. Olive oil, a valuable commodity in the ancient Near East, symbolizes the resources and wealth that Israel was willing to expend to secure these alliances. This reflects a lack of faith in God's provision and protection, similar to the warnings given in **Isaiah 30:1-2** against relying on Egypt.

Duane Garrett: The point is not that Yahweh had forbidden Israel all commercial contacts with other nations but that Israel had allowed its political and economic ties to these nations to give them a false sense of security. Like someone who has tried to make a pet of a tiger, they have forgotten how dangerous these nations are.

John Schultz: Hosea's words, probably, refer to the political maneuvers of King Hoshea who tried to wiggle himself out of his liaison with Assyria by befriending Egypt, a plot which, ultimately, brought Israel down as a nation.

3. (12:2) Summary Indictment Demanding Divine Retribution

*"The LORD also has a dispute with Judah,
And will punish Jacob according to his ways;
He will repay him according to his deeds."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: vv. 2-6 -- Hosea interrupts his denunciation of Ephraim's deceitfulness with a suggestion that she follow the example of an ancient deceiver, who through repentance obtained the power of God.

Gary Smith: Hosea does not draw a lesson from this incident, but he apparently wants to show how the Israelites struggle for their own way against God just like their forefather, and they will only prevail if they **obtain God's blessing**. They should stop fighting God and start begging for his compassion. Maybe they can be transformed into a new nation, just as Jacob became a different man through these events.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The choice of the eponym "*Jacob*" presents a fascinating literary ambiguity. It can represent either Israel (and thus be a fitting parallel to Judah) or both nations together (thus serving as an appropriate closing, wide-ranging term for all the people of God in **11:12 – 12:2**). In other words, "*Jacob*" is, at once, **particular and inclusive**. The name also functions as a transition to the next passage, which repeatedly appeals to the patriarch.

H. D. Beeby: Such behavior draws from God a deserved **threat**, which is expressed in a triple statement: God will indict, punish, and requite, for he is prosecutor, judge, and executioner.

B. (12:3-5) Deliverance of Deceitful Jacob via Obtaining God's Blessing

1. (:3-4) Story of Jacob's Deliverance

a. Character of a Deceitful Supplanter

"In the womb he took his brother by the heel,"

Biblehub: **In the womb he grasped his brother's heel** -- This phrase refers to the birth of Jacob and Esau, as recorded in **Genesis 25:24-26**. Jacob's grasping of Esau's heel symbolizes his future **struggle for supremacy and blessing**, which is a recurring theme in his life. The act of grasping the heel is significant in Hebrew culture, as it foreshadows Jacob's later actions to secure the birthright and blessing meant for the firstborn. This event is foundational in understanding the character of Jacob, whose name itself means "*he who grasps the heel*" or "*supplanter*." The imagery of the heel is also seen in **Genesis 3:15**, where it is prophesied that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head, indicating a struggle between good and evil.

Gary Smith: Jacob is pictured as one who spent his life using deceptive means to get ahead instead of trusting God—the same thing the people of Israel in Hosea’s audience are doing.

John Calvin: Their ingratitude is showed in this, that they did not acknowledge that they had been anticipated, in the person of their father Jacob, by the gratuitous mercy of God. The first history is indeed referred to for this end, that the posterity of Jacob might understand that **they had been elected by God before they were born**. For Jacob did not, by choice or design, lay hold of the heel of his brother in his mother’s womb; but it was an extraordinary thing. It was, then, God who guided the hand of the infant and by this sign testified his adoption to be gratuitous. In short, by saying that Jacob held the foot of his brother in his mother’s womb, the same thing is intended as if God had reminded the Israelites that they did not excel other people by their own virtue or that of their parents, but that God of his own good pleasure had chosen them.

b. Crisis of Struggle and Transformation

“And in his maturity he contended with God.

Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed;”

Trent Butler: The Hebrew word translated *as a man* is literally “*in his strength*.” It refers to the **virility of manhood** as opposed to the weakness of a baby in the womb. The same word is also used for wickedness that works itself out in futility (**Hos. 12:11**), injustice (**Hos. 6:8**), and false worship (**Hos. 10:8**).

Biblehub: **Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed** -- This phrase refers to the patriarch Jacob's encounter with an angel, as recounted in **Genesis 32:24-30**. Jacob's struggle with the angel is symbolic of his spiritual struggle and transformation. The angel is often interpreted as a theophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, which is why Jacob's prevailing is significant. It represents the perseverance of faith and the importance of wrestling with God in prayer and seeking His blessing. This event took place near the Jabbok River, a tributary of the Jordan, highlighting the geographical significance of the location in Jacob's journey back to Canaan.

James Mays: First, he supplanted his brother, and then he undertook to overpower God himself – so passionate and absolute was his self-will.

Derek Kidner: His ultimate name, **Israel**, speaks very differently: of tenacity without stealth (*‘he strives’*), and of a preoccupation, in the last-resort, not with man but with God. The transformation that this implies is put with beautiful economy in the first two lines of **verse 4**, initially portraying his aggression and will to win, redirected now towards the nobler end of having power with God (yet still in terms of imposing his own will on his great adversary), but finally portraying him as a suppliant for grace; his arrogance broken, but not his eagerness. The story is told in **Genesis 32:22-32**.

Even so, **verse 4** has one more point to make: that the re-making of the man had its origin not in his own enterprise, but in God’s initiative revealed at Bethel long before,

in that classic display of **grace unexpected, unsought and overwhelming**.

c. Cry for Mercy and Favor

“He wept and sought His favor.”

Allen Guenther: The blessing has been legitimated through what must be understood as deep remorse and thorough repentance. *He wept and he [God] showed him mercy (Hos. 12:4b)*. Jacob’s prayer, uttered in great fear and distress (cf. **Gen. 32:9-12**), captures the spirit of contrition and dependence which pleases God.

Only such life-changing repentance can result in a new self-disclosure of God, as at Bethel (cf. **Gen. 35:1-7**). If Israel is to have any hope for a future in the land, it will require similar repentance and submission.

Alternate View:

Robin Routledge: And, while Jacob insists on receiving a blessing (**Gen. 32:26**), there is no specific mention of **weeping and seeking favour**. **Sweeney** (2000: 122) suggests that it is the man defeated by Jacob who pleads for favour, though that seems unlikely. The language of weeping and the request for favour is used, though, when Jacob meets Esau (**Gen. 33:4, 8**), and it is possible that the four lines in **verses 3–4a** have a chiasmic structure: the first and last refer to Jacob’s relationship with Esau, while the middle two are parallel references to the encounter at Peniel (**Holladay** 1966: 53–64; cf. **Garrett** 1997: 239). Jacob’s reunion with Esau may then serve as a model for the humility required, in Hosea’s day, to end the conflict between north and south.

d. Communication with God at Bethel

*“He found Him at Bethel,
And there He spoke with us,”*

Biblehub: **and spoke with Him there** -- The communication between Jacob and God at Bethel emphasizes the personal relationship God desires with His people. It highlights the importance of listening to God's voice and responding in obedience. This encounter at Bethel is a **pivotal moment** in Jacob's life, marking a transformation in his character and a deepening of his faith. It serves as a type of Christ, foreshadowing the ultimate revelation of God through Jesus, who is the mediator between God and humanity (**1 Timothy 2:5**).

James Mays: The appeal to Jacob is an appeal to a deceiver who had himself to be overcome by God’s power. Let them hear the word of God to the chastened Jacob as God’s answer to their appeal.

Duane Garrett: Because Hosea wants to present us with a theological portrayal of the transformation of Jacob, **he rearranges the order of the story** by placing the name “*Bethel*” at the end of the poem. In reality the first Bethel episode (**Gen 28:10–22**) took place many years earlier than the Peniel episode. It was at Bethel, however, that Jacob received from God the promise that he would inherit the promises given to his fathers

Abraham and Isaac (**Gen 28:13**). Hosea places Bethel at the end of his retelling of the story to create a contrast between the grace Jacob received and his life of conniving, scheming, and struggling. That is, Jacob's machinations and battles for survival represented his old life, his life without grace, whereas his reception of the promises at Bethel represented his new life, although chronologically the first Bethel incident came prior to some of his greatest struggles. Hosea has rearranged the order of the material in order **to create a contrast between the old Jacob and the new Jacob**, the man who received the promises at Bethel and was later renamed Israel.

M. Daniel Carroll R: The movement from Jacob's birth to the wrestling at the river's edge to the emotional reunion with Esau to the dream at Bethel has as its goal to trace the **transformation in Jacob**. At Bethel he met God and was changed. This event is the theological climax of the allusions, even though they break with the order of the Genesis narrative. The message is that the great, but flawed, patriarch became a broken man before God.

Trent Butler: Jacob's story is one of struggle, weakness, deception, and victory and intimacy with God.

2. (:5) Supremacy of the Lord Who Alone Can Deliver
*"Even the LORD, the God of hosts;
The LORD is His name."*

Biblehub: the LORD God of Hosts -- This phrase emphasizes the sovereignty and supreme authority of God over all heavenly armies and earthly powers. The term "**LORD**" is the English representation of the Hebrew name **Yahweh**, which signifies **God's eternal and self-existent nature**. "*God of Hosts*" (Hebrew: "*Yahweh Sabaoth*") is a title that underscores **God's command over the angelic armies**, reflecting His omnipotence and ability to execute His will throughout creation. This title is frequently used in the Old Testament, especially in prophetic literature, to remind Israel of God's power and His ability to protect and deliver His people. It also serves as a warning to those who oppose Him, as seen in passages like **Isaiah 1:24** and **Jeremiah 11:20**.

Trent Butler: Israel forgot the power of the God who fought their battles and created their nation. Israel confused this God with the various gods of their enemies and attributed equal power and influence to those gods. Israel had to remember how their God was remembered and named among them. No other god controlled the earthly and heavenly armies.

C. (12:6) Directions for Spiritual Revival

Gary Smith: Hosea concludes this paragraph with an **application** to his listeners: "*But you*" or "*But as for you*." He tries to persuade his audience to "*return to your God*" as Jacob finally did, to have steadfast covenantal love for the God who made such great promises to Jacob, to follow the just practices outlined in the covenant stipulations in the Torah, and to earnestly wait for God in difficult times (**12:6**). Hope is possible if

God's people follow his way, but not if they continue to follow the path of their ancestor Jacob. They cannot determine their own destiny through more manipulation and duplicity; they must listen to what God has said and learn from how he dealt with Jacob.

Duane Garrett: The nation of Israel continues to live like Jacob the conniver, the man without grace. Like the old Jacob, they struggle for success and seek security not in God but in wealth. Hosea calls for three things from his people: repentance, justice, and faith.

1. Conversion – Return to God / Repent

“Therefore, return to your God,”

Trent Butler: A holy God requires a holy people, so returning to God means returning to the holy lifestyle he demands.

2. Conduct – Practice Kindness and Justice / Restore Righteousness

“Observe kindness and justice,”

3. Composure – Wait for God / Rely Continually on God

“And wait for your God continually.”

Biblehub: and always wait on your God -- This phrase encourages a posture of trust and dependence on God. "*Waiting*" on God involves patience and faith, recognizing His sovereignty and timing (**Psalm 27:14**). In the historical context, Israel often turned to foreign alliances and idols for security, rather than trusting in God. This call to "*wait*" is a reminder of the need for faithfulness and reliance on God alone, as seen in **Isaiah 40:31**, where those who wait on the Lord renew their strength. This waiting is also a type of the Christian hope in Christ's return, where believers are called to live in expectation and readiness (**Titus 2:13**).

II. (12:7-8) EXCUSING OPPRESSIVE EXPLOITATION CHARACTERIZED BY MISPLACED SECURITY AND MISTAKEN CONFIDENCE

Gary Smith: Hosea now analyzes the contemporary economic situation where deceit rules instead of justice. The Israelite merchants are acting like their Canaanite neighbors by using **dishonest scales** in their business dealings. By rigging two sets of weights for the scale, they can use one that is too heavy or too light. The merchant “defrauds” people by requiring that they put 110 percent of a shekel to balance his heavy weight. Or when the merchant sells, he weighs his product using a light weight so that he gives his customers only 90 percent of what they deserve.

This reminds one of Jacob's attempts to get ahead financially by taking advantage of Esau and Laban (**Gen. 25:27–34; 30:30–43**) as well as his attempt to bribe Esau with his wealth in order to escape responsibility for past mistreatment of his brother (**Gen.**

32). The people in Hosea's day continue this tradition. Those in the upper class boast about their illegally gained wealth (**Hos. 12:8**) and boldly flaunt their affluence with great houses that are richly decorated (cf. **Amos 3:15**). To make things worse, these same people think they are above the law, claiming that no one can ever make any charges stick against them (**Hos. 12:8b**). They are **trusting in their wealth** to protect them, not the legal system or God. Like Mafia generals, they fix any court case so that they will never be held accountable for their deceptive financial dealings. They think they are above both the laws of God and the nation's legal system.

Pulpit Commentary: **Vers. 7-14** contain a fresh description of Israel's **apostasy**. To this the prophet is led by the preceding train of thought. When he called to mind the earnestness of the patriarch to obtain the blessing, the sincerity of his repentance, and the evidences of conversion, consisting in mercy and judgment and constant waiting on God, he looks around on Israel, and finding those virtues conspicuous by their absence, he repeats the story of their degeneracy.

A. (:7) Materialistic Greed

*"A merchant, in whose hands are false balances,
He loves to oppress."*

B. (:8a) Misplaced Security

*"And Ephraim said, 'Surely I have become rich,
I have found wealth for myself;'"*

Lloyd Ogilvie: Wealth does have an insulating force. It makes one foolishly think that he can control his environment and destiny, as well as people and groups. Here Ephraim places itself above reproach and any accountability to God in the use of wealth. **Wolff** translates the Hebrew text, "*All my gains bring me no guilt that would be sin.*" This is in blatant denial of Hosea's charge. Their wealth had been gained dishonestly and had not been used to lift the burden of the oppressed. . .

A friend of mine who is a wealthy entrepreneur confided, "The power of money is intoxicating. It will get you anything you want from people except real love and will get you into any place except heaven. The more you have, the closer you have to stay to God. The minute you think you've got what you have in your own strength, you've got an idol; and the day you spend or give or invest without gratefully asking for guidance, you're on the way to using money to manipulate. And when you think you're perfect in the way you handle money, trouble is on the way."

Biblehub: **And Ephraim boasts** -- Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel, is often depicted as prideful and self-reliant. This boast reflects a false sense of security and self-sufficiency, ignoring their dependence on God. The name Ephraim is frequently used in the prophetic books to symbolize the ten tribes of Israel, highlighting their spiritual and moral decline. This pride is reminiscent of the warnings in **Proverbs 16:18**, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*"

How rich I have become! -- The wealth of Ephraim is seen as a source of pride and self-congratulation. This reflects a materialistic culture that equates prosperity with divine favor, a common belief in the ancient Near East. However, this wealth is illusory and temporary, as it is not accompanied by righteousness. The Bible often warns against the deceitfulness of riches, as seen in **1 Timothy 6:10**, where the love of money is described as the root of all kinds of evil.

I have found wealth for myself -- This phrase underscores the self-centeredness and self-reliance of Ephraim. The emphasis on "for myself" indicates a lack of acknowledgment of God as the source of all blessings. This attitude is contrary to the biblical teaching that all wealth and success come from God, as seen in **Deuteronomy 8:18**, which reminds the Israelites to remember the Lord who gives them the ability to produce wealth.

C. (:8b) Mistaken Confidence and Self Deception

"In all my labors they will find in me No iniquity, which would be sin."

Biblehub: In all my labors -- Ephraim's focus on their own efforts and achievements highlights a works-based mentality, neglecting the role of divine grace. This reflects a broader cultural context where human effort was often seen as the primary means of achieving success. However, the Bible teaches that human labor is ultimately futile without God's blessing, as expressed in **Psalms 127:1**, *"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain."*

they can find in me no iniquity that is sinful -- This self-assessment of innocence is a form of self-deception, as it ignores the pervasive sinfulness that God sees. The claim of being without sin is contradicted by the prophetic messages throughout Hosea, which accuse Israel of idolatry and unfaithfulness. This echoes the New Testament teaching in **1 John 1:8**, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* The phrase also foreshadows the need for a savior, pointing to Jesus Christ, who alone is without sin and can offer true redemption.

III. (12:9-14) EXCHANGING FUTURE RESTORATION FOR DIVINE RETRIBUTION IS ISRAEL'S TRAGIC STORY OF APOSTASY

A. (:9-10) Preparing Israel for Future Restoration

1. (:9) Restoration Has Always Been God's Goal for His People

*"But I have been the LORD your God since the land of Egypt;
I will make you live in tents again,
As in the days of the appointed festival."*

John Schultz: Scholars are divided as to the meaning of these words. Some see in them a **threat of punishment**: God will reduce them to the former primitive conditions from the time of the desert crossing. Others read this as a **promise of restoration**. Some even see in them a combination of the two. . .

The **Feast of Tabernacles** was the last in the cycle of festivities of the Jewish year. It coincided with the end of the harvest. We find its institution in Leviticus: *“So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”*

The feast was a strange combination of rejoicing and sober reflection. It reminded man of the **transient character of life on earth and the faithfulness of God in leading him through the desert of life**. The celebration of this particular feast must have fallen through the cracks in the affluence of the northern kingdom. All of the feasts that the law prescribed were meant to remind Israel of its history and position, of the fact that God had chosen them to play a vital part in this world. It was essential that the people would not forget from where they came and how they had arrived. The testimony of God’s grace ran through all of the commemorations. The people in Hosea’s days had done away with all the celebrations God had ordained. They neither celebrated the Day of Atonement, nor the Feast of Tabernacles. God always wants man to know the way of salvation in the pardon of his sins and the fact that all life on earth is like living in a tent. People who do not celebrate these two crucial facts are lost.

The people who returned from the Babylonian captivity celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. In that sense, they fulfilled Hosea’s prophecy here. We read in Nehemiah: *“The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.”* Zechariah prophesied that this feast would be celebrated universally at the end of times. We read: *“Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.”*

Gary Smith: Verse 9 gives Yahweh’s response to Ephraim’s boasting. Everything they have and are has come through him. *‘I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt’* (nrsv; cf. 13:4) echoes the frequently repeated statement *‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt’* (cf. Exod. 20:2; Lev. 25:38; Deut. 5:6; Ps. 81:10). This emphasizes the distinctive nature of the relationship between God and his people, established through the Sinaitic covenant. It was Yahweh who brought the people into Canaan, and for all their boasting it was he, not they, who enabled them to prosper there. But they do not acknowledge Yahweh, and have instead taken on the characteristics of Canaan. As a result, they will be taken back to a time before the settlement had its adverse effects. The reference to *living in tents* points particularly to the exodus. The *‘appointed festival’* (nrsv) may be the feast of Tabernacles (cf. 9:5), when the people constructed booths to recall the days in the desert.

Alternate View:

Lloyd Ogilvie: The rich nation will be forced to live in nomad tents as in the wilderness during the exodus. In the forthcoming exile the people will be brought to a new sense of loyalty and gratitude such as they had when the appointed feast, the Feast of the Tabernacles, was a time of praise to God as their provider.

Duane Garrett: Once again Yahweh declares that he will **undo the exodus** and return Israel to the status of being no longer a nation. Here, however, he speaks of a return to wilderness rather than a return to slavery. In declaring himself to be their Savior-God, the one who came to their aid when they were slaves in Egypt, Yahweh asserts his sovereignty over them. The NIV translation is somewhat misleading at the end of the verse, “*as in the days of your appointed feasts.*” The word translated “*appointed feasts*” is actually singular and refers to only one feast, **the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths**. This was the annual holy week in which Israel memorialized the wilderness wandering by leaving their homes and spending a week in tents or in hastily constructed, temporary lean-to shelters (**Lev 23:33–44**). Probably a fair number of the people did not relish the idea of having to move outdoors and live like this for one week a year, and Yahweh's point is that **the discomfort of the booths would become a permanent condition**. They would become, like their ancestors, **homeless wanderers**. The verse looks ahead to Israel's **Diaspora**.

Jeremy Thomas: And God says you didn't learn a thing from the wilderness wanderings so I guess we'll just have to teach the lesson again. There's no substitute for review. You rebelled at Kadesh Barnea and you rebelled at Samaria and Gilgal and all the rest of the high places and so therefore since you commit the same sin, you get the same punishment. I will make you live in tents again, As in the days of the appointed festival, which is the festival of booths. That feast was a reminder to the nation, never, never to rebel against the command of the Lord because there are consequences to sin, God judges sin and so every year they'd build these booths at the appointed time as a reminder.

2. (:10) Revelation Provided Guidance and Warnings

*“I have also spoken to the prophets, And I gave numerous visions;
And through the prophets I gave parables.”*

Duane Garrett: Yahweh's point is that he has been warning the people, albeit sometimes in a puzzling form, but they are too stubborn and too obtuse to receive the warnings.

Trent Butler: **Israel had no excuse**. They could not plead ignorance. God made his point with emphatic repetition. God spoke to the prophets, with the normal prophetic visions as the means of reception and the parables or comparative sayings as the prophetic method of teaching. God had spoken, but Israel refused to acknowledge the prophets as God's inspired speakers.

B. (:11) Punishing Spiritual Unfaithfulness – 2 Historical Examples

1. Accusation against Gilead and Devastating Punishment

*“Is there iniquity in Gilead?
Surely they are worthless.”*

Biblehub: **Is there iniquity in Gilead?** -- Gilead, a region east of the Jordan River, was known for its balm and fertile land. Historically, it was a place of refuge and healing, yet here it is questioned for iniquity. This rhetorical question implies the presence of sin and corruption, contrasting its reputation. The region's spiritual decline reflects Israel's broader unfaithfulness to God, as seen in other prophetic writings like **Jeremiah 8:22**, where Gilead's balm is mentioned in the context of spiritual sickness.

Gary Smith: As punishment Gilead will be reduced to nothing, a “worthless” thing. Moreover, the stones on the altars at Gilgal will look like unorganized piles of rocks on a plowed field rather than a sacred altar for worship. Both images project a picture of destruction so severe that nothing of value is left. This once proud and prosperous people will end up having nothing and becoming nothing because of their deceptive ways.

2. Accusation against Gilgal and Devastating Punishment

*“In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls,
Yes, their altars are like the stone heaps
Beside the furrows of the field.”*

Biblehub: **Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal?** -- Gilgal was a significant site in Israel's history, associated with the Israelites' first encampment after crossing the Jordan and the renewal of the covenant (**Joshua 4:19-24**). However, it became a **center of idolatrous worship**, as indicated in **Amos 4:4**. The mention of sacrificing bulls suggests a continuation of ritualistic practices devoid of true devotion to God, highlighting the people's misplaced trust in religious formalism rather than genuine faith.

C. (:12-13) Protecting with the Goal of Blessing

Gary Smith: The purpose of bringing up this history is unclear. Hosea does not seem to condemn Jacob for going to Laban to find a wife and doing the demeaning work of tending sheep, nor does Hosea suggest Jacob should not have married Laban's daughters. **Andersen and Freedman** believe Hosea is contrasting Jacob's enslavement of “*keeping/tending*” sheep for a wife with the prophet Moses' “*keeping/caring*” for the Israelites (**Hos. 12:13**) when they came up from Egypt to freedom. **Garrett** finds other parallels between Jacob in Aram and Israel in Egypt: Both were in foreign lands; both worked in slavery for a time; both were delivered by God from enslavement; both had great wealth when they left.

The similarity of “*keeping/caring/tending*” draws the experiences together, but the contrast between Jacob's experiences and those of Israel in Egypt is greater than the

similarities. Through Jacob's own efforts he managed to survive Esau's hatred and worked for a wife, but the nation of Israel was freed from working as slaves by God's grace through Moses. The implication is that Hosea's audience should not follow the patterns of Jacob (self-effort and deception) but should allow God to care for them and bring them freedom through another prophet (Hosea).

Unfortunately, Israel has rejected God's grace and does not listen to God's prophets; consequently, they "*provoke him to anger*" (12:14). Therefore God, the Lord and master of Israel, will hold the nation accountable for its deeds. The verdict is **guilty**; they will have to pay the penalty for their sins.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The key word of **verses 12 and 13** is *šāmar*, "*keep, preserve, or tend.*" Reference is again made to Jacob, a keeper of sheep. Then Moses is mentioned as the keeper of the nation, during the exodus (12:12–13). **Stuart** suggests the deeper meaning of the use of *šāmar*.

Hosea's implication is clear: the sheep have strayed from their shepherd's keeping (cf. **Is. 53:6**). The person, Israel, kept (*šmr*) sheep. The nation Israel was kept (*šmr*) by the prophet Moses who remains their keeper through the covenant he mediated. On the basis of this catchword Hosea builds not a syllogism but a simple reminder: Israel disobeyed the keeper by not keeping the covenant. . . . Inasmuch as *šmr* is the verb most associated with keeping the commandments/covenant of Yahweh in the Old Testament, occurring scores of times in that sense, the mere mention of *šmr* as what Moses did for Israel—on the analogy of what Jacob did for sheep—must have been intended as a subtle reminder of Israel's central task.

1. (:12) Case of Jacob

*"Now Jacob fled to the land of Aram,
And Israel worked for a wife,
And for a wife he kept sheep."*

Biblehub: Jacob fled to the land of Aram -- This phrase refers to the biblical account of Jacob, the patriarch, who fled to the land of Aram to escape the wrath of his brother Esau (**Genesis 27:41-45**). Aram, also known as Padan-Aram, is located in the region of modern-day Syria. This journey marks a significant turning point in Jacob's life, as it is during his time in Aram that he encounters God in a dream at Bethel (**Genesis 28:10-22**). The flight to Aram is a reminder of God's providence and protection over Jacob, despite his deceptive actions. It also sets the stage for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, as Jacob's time in Aram leads to the expansion of his family, which becomes the nation of Israel.

for a wife he tended sheep -- Jacob's work as a shepherd during his time in Aram is significant both culturally and theologically. Shepherding was a common occupation in the ancient Near East, and it required patience, diligence, and care—qualities that God would later require of the leaders of Israel. This role as a shepherd also prefigures the

imagery of God as the Shepherd of Israel (**Psalm 23**) and ultimately points to Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (**John 10:11**). Jacob's tending of sheep is a humble task that underscores the theme of servitude and foreshadows the servanthood of Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve (**Mark 10:45**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The repetition of the verb *šmr* joins **v.12** (“*he tended [sheep]*”) to **v.13** (“*he [Yahweh] cared for*”). Once again, the view taken of the Jacob reference is determinative. If the patriarch stands as a negative lesson, the “prophet”—most likely Moses—serves to contrast his behavior with Yahweh’s providential provision. My approach, however, likens the dedication of the humbled patriarch to **God’s care as instances of grace**. Moses was the prophet par excellence (**Dt 18:15–19**). He was the first of the prophets sent to Israel over these many years (cf. **v.10**). Now Hosea is another in that line. **Will the nation respond to Yahweh through this prophet? Can they be transformed as dramatically as Jacob and receive God’s blessing?**

2. (:13) Case of Israel

*“But by a prophet the LORD brought Israel from Egypt,
And by a prophet he was kept.”*

Biblehub: But by a prophet -- In the biblical narrative, prophets are chosen by God to deliver His messages and guide His people. The reference here is to **Moses**, who is considered one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history. Moses was instrumental in leading the Israelites out of Egypt, acting as God's mouthpiece. Prophets in the Old Testament often served as intermediaries between God and His people, providing guidance, warnings, and revelations. This highlights the importance of prophetic leadership in God's plan for His people.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: This verse makes it clear that there is **no chance for change in Ephraim**. The lessons from Jacob’s life and other incidents of the past have no effect on Israel. It has “*bitterly [tamrûrîm, abstract plural of intensity, GKC §124d] provoked*” Yahweh (cf. **Dt 4:25–26**). To this transgression is added the sin of “*contempt*” (*herpâ*), possibly disdain for the true God and his demands (NIV, NRSV, NJPS; **Stuart**, 196; **Davies**, 284). These descriptions reveal how deeply rooted is rebellion in the heart of the people (cf. “*a spirit of prostitution*” in **4:12; 5:4**). Their crimes bring bloodguilt (*dāmîm*, “*bloods*”; cf. HALOT, 225). That is, their sins are worthy of the death penalty (cf. **Lev 20**)—in this case, destruction in warfare, which will come at the hand of Israel’s divine Master (*’adōnāy*).

James Mays: Israel should not see themselves in Jacob, but instead in the identity given them in the Exodus. There they were the object of Yahweh’s deliverance. There it was Yahweh who acted and did the keeping. While Jacob’s life was determined by a wife, Israel’s life was determined by a prophet. The reference must be to Moses.

Trent Butler: Again God testifies to his history with Israel. Earlier he highlighted the **prophetic office** as his way of informing Israel of their sin and thus giving them no excuse for sin. Now he highlights that office further by identifying Moses as a prophet

(Deut. 18:15) who brought Israel up from Egypt and cared for him. Hosea uses the same Hebrew word to speak of Jacob tending sheep in **Hosea 12:12** and the prophet caring for Israel here. Hosea is the prophet like Moses, tending his generation, while Israel is the insignificant Jacob of that generation, tending sheep—not people. God provided Israel the prophet they needed, but **Israel would not accept that leadership** or acknowledge God's care.

D. (:14) Provoking Divine Retribution Instead of Repenting and Submitting

1. Retribution Demanded

“Ephraim has provoked to bitter anger;”

Trent Butler: The Hebrew text does not have an expressed object, so that the prophet or God himself may be seen as becoming angry. The ambiguity here may be intentional, but obviously **God's anger is the central focus**.

2. Retribution Deserved

*“So his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him,
And bring back his reproach to him.”*

Biblehub: and repay him for his contempt -- The word "*contempt*" here signifies a deep disrespect and disregard for God's covenant and commandments. This phrase indicates that God will enact justice by repaying Ephraim according to their deeds, a theme consistent throughout the Old Testament, as seen in passages like **Deuteronomy 32:35** and **Psalms 94:2**. The idea of **divine retribution** is central to the prophetic message, emphasizing that God's patience has limits and that persistent sin will lead to consequences. This repayment is not only punitive but also serves as a call to repentance and a return to covenant faithfulness.

J. Andrew Dearman: **Verse 14** is a somber conclusion to an intricately developed case against Ephraim/Israel. What is set forth as a transformative possibility in **v. 6** simply hangs there in the midst of a didactic lesson that comes to the sad conclusion that Ephraim's guilt and reproach will come back upon him.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What lessons do we learn from the names of God revealed in this passage?
- 2) What are some ways we can take more seriously the warnings and exhortations contained in God's revelation to us?
- 3) How can you apply the lessons from the historical story of the patriarch Jacob to your own life?

4) How do we cultivate an attitude of continually waiting on the Lord?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Anthony Petterson: The final major section of the book begins. This unit draws out the connections between the behavior of Ephraim and Judah and that of their forefather Jacob/Israel in Genesis, which was marked by lies and deceit (cf. **Ge 27:24, 35**). For Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel), the lies and deceit relate to the treaty arrangements they made with Assyria and Egypt, even though they were in a covenant relationship with God (**Hos 12:1**; cf. **7:11; 8:8-10**). Ephraim is also charged with violence (**12:1**). The charge against Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) is that their ways and deeds are out of step with God, just as Jacob grasped his brother's heel and struggled with God. But just as Jacob returned to Bethel and begged for favor and won a blessing by God's grace (**Ge 32:22-30**), so Israel must return to God and live out the covenant obligations – maintaining love and justice (cf. **Hos 2:19**) and waiting on God (trusting him) rather than entering into treaties with other nations. Yet there is dishonesty and fraud within the community, as well as self-deception and moral blindness to their own sin and arrogance. God has known the people from their nation's beginning. He brought them out of Egypt to live in tents on the way to the promised land, but now he will send them back to Egypt in punishment. Furthermore, God sent his prophets to reveal his will to his people (**12:10**). The implication is that they should have known better. The wickedness in the towns of Gilead and Gilgal is highlighted again (cf. **4:15; 6:8; 9:15**). God will destroy their corrupt worship. Just as Jacob fled to Aram (Syria), to the north of Israel, after deceiving his father and tended sheep, so the Lord tended Israel (his sheep and his wife) with a prophet (Moses) while the people were outside the land. Unlike Jacob, who returned to God and won a blessing, the implicit argument is that Israel/Ephraim has rejected the shepherding care God has offered through the prophets. The Lord's anger at Ephraim's unrepentant violence and contempt means Ephraim will be punished (cf. **12:2**).

Robin Routledge: These verses compare and contrast Ephraim/Israel with Jacob. Israel shares Jacob's deceitfulness: deceiving others, and also deceiving themselves into thinking that they are better than they are, and able to solve their own problems without Yahweh (cf. **11:12 – 12:1; 12:7–8**). There are, though, more positive aspects. Despite Jacob's deceitfulness, God met with him at Bethel and entered into a relationship with him there. Bethel has since become a centre of corrupt worship, but things didn't begin that way, and the people may still return to God (**12:6**) and trust him as Jacob did. The reference to Jacob serving for, and being devoted to, a wife and bringing her back to the Promised Land is also linked with Yahweh's care for Israel, and recalls the metaphor of Israel as Yahweh's bride in **chapters 1–3**. And, again, there is the suggestion of a return to the desert (**12:9**; cf. **2:14–15**): Yahweh remains committed to his people and wants to restore the love and commitment of earlier days (cf. **Rev. 2:4–5**).

One further key element here, which picks up on earlier statements, is the role of God's prophets (**12:10, 13**) in guarding and guiding the life of the nation. The people have been brought into a covenant relationship with Yahweh, and he continues to care for them, despite their failures. A key role of prophets was to call the people back to their covenant obligations. For Israel in Hosea's day, this emphasizes the importance of listening to God's representatives. For the church, it points to the continuing importance of being open to, and guided by, God's Word.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The Jacob Syndrome

Sooner or later, we must have a **Jabbok encounter**. For some, it happens when they become Christians; for others, it comes later. Our Jabbok encounters occur at the time when we come to the end of trying to **manipulate** life, others, and God. Especially God. Our Jabbok is when we are completely honest with God. We give up our patterns of duplicity and dissembling, posturing and pretending. Our real self meets the true God. And we go to the mat for a **wrestling match over who will run our lives**. The first Jabbok encounter took place between Jacob and God. Jacob the manipulator met God the mansmith. Some background is helpful to understand what happened at Jabbok.

From the moment of birth to manhood, Jacob had been a **crafty conniver**. Before he came out of Rebekah's womb, he tried to cheat his twin, Esau. He was born with his hand clutching Esau's heel. His birth-name means "he-is-at-the-heel," though the root really means "to deceive." He lived down to his name in stealing his brother's birthright and in manipulating Isaac for the blessing. Enmity between Jacob and Esau ensued. Fearing for his life, Jacob left home and headed for Paddan-Aram to live with his uncle, Laban.

On his way to Paddan-Aram, one night Jacob had a dream about a ladder set on earth but reaching up to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. He was lifted up into the presence of God. In the dream, God assured him of a greater birthright than he had manipulated Isaac to get. [**Genesis 28:13-15**]

When Jacob awoke he said, *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. . . . How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"* (**Gen. 28:16-17**). He had not expected to meet God under the stars there at Luz. Note that he was not searching for God and certainly had done nothing to deserve a revelation from God. What it did for Jacob was to confirm Isaac's blessing. Jacob was deeply moved by his dream and built an altar calling it Bethel, meaning *"house of God,"* and made a vow to tithe a tenth of all the Lord would give him. Jacob the manipulator was confronted with the majesty of God, who was getting him ready for what would happen at Jabbok twenty years later.

At Paddan-Aram Jacob almost met his match in his uncle Laban, a rogue of rogues. When Jacob fell in love with Laban's daughter Rachel, he struck a bargain with Laban. He offered to work for seven years for Rachel's hand. Laban agreed, but with a trick up his sleeve. When the seven years were up, Jacob demanded his beloved Rachel. Laban

gave a wedding feast and late at night sent Leah, his older daughter, to Jacob's tent as his wife instead of Rachel. The feast must have had more than enough libation to dull Jacob's perception, for he did not know until morning that it was Leah and not Rachel with whom he had consummated the marriage. Strange irony—reminiscent of the deed of deception he accomplished when he falsified his identity with his near-blind father for the birthright. Life does have costly boomerang for the deceptive!

Laban had outmaneuvered Jacob the manipulator. He persuaded Jacob to work another week before he could marry Rachel, work another seven years to keep her, and six years beyond that. These thirteen years were prosperous and productive, but not without conflict between the women in Jacob's life. Rachel and Leah had a continuing battle over Jacob's affections. Leah bore him six sons and a daughter. This prompted Rachel, who was barren through the first years of marriage, to have two children vicariously through her maid, whom she gave to Jacob. Not to be outdone, Leah, at a time when she had temporarily stopped bearing, gave Jacob her maid for two more sons. That made ten sons. Finally, Joseph was born to Rachel, and she died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin.

When the twenty years were completed at long last, Jacob was restless, for there was unfinished business in his soul. He could not forget what he had done to Esau, and he longed to return home. After a further double-cross from Laban, and Jacob had rebuilt his herd, he secretly left Laban's land with great prosperity and strength. When Laban caught up with him, a negotiated truce between them was possible only because of an intervention of the Lord. Laban was warned by God to deal fairly with Jacob and let him go. It was not Jacob's wit or will that won the battle. The repeated phrase, "*The Lord was with Jacob*," repeatedly punctuates the account.

Indeed, the Lord was with Jacob. God was getting Jacob ready for a very decisive encounter, not just with Esau, but with Himself. Jacob would not have been ready for what God had in store for him on his journey home if he had not endured the trials and had been forced to realize that the Lord—not his grit, his guts, or his guile—made possible his triumphs and prosperity.

Free of Laban, Jacob could now get on with the task at hand, one that he dreaded. The panic he felt at the thought of meeting Esau was prompted by the memories of what he had done to his brother. The old manipulator rose to the surface again. Momentarily he fell back on his old ways rather than claiming that God was with him. Jacob sent messengers ahead to assure Esau that he had great flocks and herds to share.

Spiritual transformation is slow in any of us. There was both an old person and a new person battling within Jacob. The elaborate lengths he went to in preparing a spectacular gift for Esau indicate that Jacob was **still dependent on manipulation** rather than on God. Jacob carefully briefed his peace envoys, instructing them to tell Esau, "*Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.*" His strategy was calculated, "*I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me*" (**Gen. 32:20**).

Jacob longed for acceptance. He had never really experienced it from Isaac and had little right to expect it from Esau. What Jacob did not realize was that only God could give that precious gift. When we accept God's gift of acceptance, we finally have a chance of getting free of manipulating people to assure its flow. And that is exactly what happened to Jacob during the night before he met Esau.

Genesis 32:24–32 records vividly the battle for Jacob's soul. The Scripture says that a "*man*" wrestled with Jacob all night long at the Jabbok ford. Jacob's own testimony and the name he gave to the place of his wrestling match gives us the real truth. He called the place Peniel, which means "*the face of God*," and he said, "*I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*" (**Gen. 32:30**). In reality, now life was just beginning.

As the crucial night of encounter ended, Jacob was crippled in the socket of his thigh. **G. Campbell Morgan** has succinctly entitled the experience, "Crippled to Crown," an apt description. Jacob would not let the Lord go until He blessed him. This was Jacob's deepest need, and the lack of it was the real cause of his deceptive, manipulative life. Reading between the lines, we discern that Jacob had to face the man he had been and had to **relinquish the control of his life to God**. He persisted in his struggle that must have included soul-searching honesty and confession.

As a result of the Jabbok encounter, Jacob was given a new name. No longer Jacob, the supplanter and deceitful one, but now **Israel**, meaning "*God strives*." This became the issue for the new man emerging in the old Jacob. God had and would always strive with, for, and on behalf of him and his descendants.

God gave the blessing that Jacob longed because it is His nature to bless. The patriarch did nothing to earn or deserve it. Now he had a limp that would remind him that God touched not only the socket of his thigh but the secret places of his heart.

When morning came, it was the **beginning of new life**. We meet a totally new Jacob, now called Israel. After that night, his new name reminded him that God had striven with him and would strive for him. The deceitful, willful manipulator had become willing to be molded by God. From that time on, we feel compassion, gentleness, and receptivity in Israel.

As Israel awoke, he looked up and saw Esau coming. No panic this time. The wrestling with God had accomplished a transformation Israel was free from needing to manipulate. It was a tender scene as Esau ran to him and fell on Israel's neck. Then Israel expressed his new blessed heart, "*I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me*" (**Gen. 33:10–11**).

The **transformation of Jacob/Israel** is exactly what Hosea sees is needed in both the northern and southern kingdoms. The kingdom of Israel had descended down the

slippery, spiraling path of deceit and lies. Judah was not far behind. **Hosea 11:12 – 12:2a** shows that both nations share a common plight.

David Thompson: 5 Key Realities in the story of Jacob

Reality #1 - Jacob was a problem child from the beginning. **12:3a**

Even in his mother's womb he was not content. He tried to replace his brother. This was a sovereign moment that clearly shows God's election of an individual. God chose Israel long before the nation even knew it. Even though this episode in Jacob's life showed that, the fact is it also showed that Jacob had problems and was not content with who he was. He had a sin nature and a rebellious nature before he was even born.

Reality #2 - Jacob was contentious in his relationship with God in his mature years. **12:3b**

Now some view this as a positive thing; but the whole point here is to illustrate something wrong that ultimately became right. Jacob was a man who relied upon himself and his scheming and not God. His big problem in life was self-reliance. As one Biblical scholar said, Jacob had a contentious relationship with God most of his life. **Dr. Wiersbe** said most of Jacob's life he struggled with himself, with others and with God (Be Amazed, p. 49).

Reality #3 - Jacob wrestled with the angel of God because he wanted His blessings. **12:4a**

This wrestling match between Jacob and the angel occurred long after many years of deceit and negative things. Jacob had lied to his dad and tricked Esau out of his birthright and then fled. He met Rachel and that turned out to be a mess. He worked seven years for Laban to marry her and then he was tricked and ended up with Leah. Then he worked seven more years and got Rachel. He finally started back home years later and learns Esau is there and he is afraid. Finally Jacob realized I need God's help and he wrestled with the angel because for the first time in his life he truly wanted the blessings of God. After years of living life his way, he finally realized it wasn't working.

Reality #4 - Jacob wept and sought the favor of God. **12:4b**

I understand this to mean that Jacob became aware of his rebellion and sin. He realized he needed God's grace and he cried out for it.

Reality #5 - Jacob found God at Bethel and their God spoke to him and the nation.

Now the story of this occurs in **Genesis 32**. The reason why this wrestling match took place was because there was opposition between Jacob's will and God's will. God wanted Jacob to face Esau and Jacob wanted everyone else to face him first (**32:20/33:3**). God could have defeated Jacob at any moment, but God wanted to

humble Jacob and bring him to the place where he would willingly do God's will. In the aftermath of this episode, Jacob was a changed man. This was demonstrated by a new name (**32:20**), a new limp (**32:31**) and a new obedience (**33:1-3**). The point is this; Jacob lived many years of his life out of step and out of sync with God. He was a liar and a trickster. He was not right in his relationship with God. But in one moment of time that all changed.

A critical key to having a great relationship with God is that you return to God and start over. Even when you have blown it, God wants you back, just look at Jacob. It was time for Israel to remember that story. Israel as a nation could have the same experience in the days of Hosea. She was not right with God but that could all change if she would turn to the Lord. at all changed.

TEXT: Hosea 13:1-16

TITLE: *ARROGANT PURSUIT OF IDOLATRY LEADS TO CERTAIN DESTRUCTION*

BIG IDEA:
DEATH DEVOURS WHEN THE HELPLESS REJECT THEIR HELPER

INTRODUCTION:

Trent Butler: Guilt eventually brings the death sentence even from a God of compassion and salvation.

J. Andrew Dearman: **Chapter 13** is the second of two historically oriented prophetic lessons in **11:12–13:16 (MT 12:1–14:1)**. The first and last verses of this section frame the presentation with references to guilt and death. Ephraim's past, present, and future are briefly indicated in **13:1–3**, with a historical résumé in **vv. 4–8** that demonstrates why YHWH is angry with the people. Their destruction is at hand; their leaders cannot save them (**vv. 9–11**). The people's rebellious folly and YHWH's righteous anger together signal a deadly disaster for Israel (**vv. 12–16 [MT 13:12–14:1]**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: The final stage of the sin of pride and arrogance is to be helpless yet unwilling to cry out for God's help. Throughout Israel's history God identified Himself as the Helper. The patriarchs, prophets, priests, and psalmists discovered that He was the only reliable help in trouble. Adversity was a constant recall to trust the Helper and say with the psalmist, "*Behold, God is my helper*" (**Ps. 54:4**). Israel's darkest day came, however, when the people sank to the lowest levels of willful independence in which they no longer could admit their helplessness or call on God as their Helper. Life tumbled in, destruction was imminent, human helpers had failed. And yet, the people were helpless to confess their helplessness. The persistent refusal of God's help became a habitual pattern. They could no longer say and live the assurance that, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (**Ps. 46:1**).

Hosea 13 captures the plight of the helpless people of the northern kingdom and the final pleas of the **rejected Helper** of Israel. The end had almost come during the years of 724 and 723 B.C. Hosea's prophetic ministry was drawing to a close. What he had predicted was happening. The people had not heeded his message. The repeated opportunities to realize their helplessness without God did not break their bonds of self-sufficiency, but tightened them. Their **arrogance** was reinforced with each escape from calamity. Their survival led to further sin rather than to God.

Meanwhile the Helper waited to help. In this chapter of Hosea, we feel His pain and anguish over a helpless people addicted to independence from Him. For me, the key verse of this chapter is **verse 9**, "*O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me.*"

An exposition of this chapter in the context of a helplessness made more helpless by an inability to cry for help enables us to deal with our contemporary manifestations of this malady. Many of our listeners are on the edge of addiction to self-help. Some have resisted God's help so long that they have fallen into the greatest need of all—of not knowing they have a need. Those who are not yet at this point may still be open to realize the drift into the addiction. And surely we all know people whose helplessness has reached the stage of refusing to ask for God's help.

Robin Routledge: This begins a **new section**. However, while introducing some new terms, it also repeats earlier themes, and appears to summarize Ephraim's failure and the devastating effect of divine judgment. There is, too, a possible reprise of the possibility of resurrection (**13:14**; cf. **6:2**). This summary then prepares the way for the call to repent and the further message of hope in **chapter 14**. As an overview of the sin of the northern kingdom, it is probably set close to the fall of Samaria. However, sin is continuing and judgment is still future, suggesting that the kingdom has not fallen yet.

The passage is framed by references to Ephraim's guilt (*'āšam*) and its consequences (**vv. 1, 16**), indicating that this is a major emphasis. Themes repeated from earlier passages include worshipping idols (*'āšāb*, v. 2; cf. **4:17; 8:4; 14:8**), and especially the calf-idol (cf. **8:5–6**), the failure of kings and leaders (**vv. 10–11**; cf. **5:1; 7:3–7; 8:4; 10:3**), Ephraim's early promise in the days of the exodus, followed by ingratitude (**vv. 4–6**; cf. **9:10; 11:1–2**), and the description of coming judgment as an attack by a wild animal, in particular a lion (*šahal*, v. 7; cf. **5:14**). Ephraim's transience is also described in the same terms as the people's *hesed* (v. 3; cf. **6:4**).

I. (:1-3) PROMULGATION OF IDOLATRY LEADING TO DESTRUCTION – HOLISTIC SUMMARY

H. D. Beeby: In the first three verses the prophet addresses Ephraim and recollects a time of exaltation when Ephraim could command fear merely by speaking.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The first three verses of **Hosea 13** review the progressive dependence on substitute help rather than Yahweh that led into an addiction to independence from Him. . .

The syncretism of worshipping the Lord and Baal eventually descended into a singular loyalty to Baal. Ephraim became helpless to extricate themselves from dependence on the cult. The people no longer called for help from the Lord. . .

Over the years I have discovered that it is not just problems but a realization of the potential of what God wants done that brings us to authentic confession of our helplessness and a new trust in Him.

But each step of the way we face the danger of taking the credit ourselves or in seeking the approval and accolades of people or in human measurements of success. Whatever

causes us to forget that God is our only help and hope must consistently be recognized as a false idol and torn from its throne.

A. (:1) Past: History of Idolatry

*“When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling.
He exalted himself in Israel,
But through Baal he did wrong and died.”*

Trent Butler: In the days of the judges, Ephraim tried to assert leadership and strength before the other tribes (**Judg. 8:1**). Again under King Jeroboam II, Ephraim as the Northern Kingdom expanded its territory and influence (**2 Kgs. 14:26–27**). In those days Ephraim's voice caused other tribes or other nations to tremble in terror. Hosea depicts a different Ephraim, a dead Ephraim. What caused the death of this tribe and nation? They were guilty in their love affair with Baal and suffered its punishment (**Hos. 4:15; 5:15; 10:2**).

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Ephraim quickly established itself as one of the most powerful tribes, and that standing became a political reality when the northern tribes separated themselves from Judah and Benjamin and established a separate kingdom (**1Ki 12**). Israel often was stronger than Judah, so its political and military preeminence might be the exaltation that is meant here. The word usually translated as “*tremble*” (*retēt*) in the English versions is a *hapax legomenon*.

J. Andrew Dearman: With regard to Israel's settlement in the promised land, Macintosh has proposed that v. 1 concerns the circumstances of the formation of the breakaway kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam I and the advancement of Baal veneration under the Omride dynasty. . .

A historically based reading of v. 1 seems required initially by the vocabulary itself, however difficult it may be to identify one or more portions of the national history with it. Hosea's hearers are told that Ephraim's previous acts had brought guilt upon them and even death. The summary is intended to explain to them why the prophet offers judgment in the current historical hour. On the other hand, its terseness paints with a broad brush and almost certainly depends on material elsewhere in Hosea or used elsewhere by him in oral presentation. It is intended to underscore what has been claimed elsewhere in more detail. Thus, of the suggestions noted above, perhaps that of Macintosh is preferable, for it sets the national history in the monarchical period broadly in the context of self-aggrandizement and idolatry.

Duane Garrett: Hosea already looks upon Ephraim as “*dead*,” that is, as having passed into history and with no more hope of recovery or return. The single thing to which he attributes Ephraim's fall, moreover, is the **cult of Baal**. For Hosea the apostasy, crime, and immorality of the people stemmed from this one fundamental deviation from God's Torah.

James Mays: The indictment begins with a reference to the time when Ephraim's position within Israel was so superior that even his speaking provoked apprehension and trembling among the rest of the tribes. Hosea generally uses "*Ephraim*" as a name for the contemporary northern state, a synonym for Israel; for that reason a tradition from the lore about the tribe, Ephraim, can be applied to the whole nation. References to Ephraim's **pre-eminence** appear in such texts as the blessing of Jacob on Ephraim and Manasseh (**Gen. 48**) and in **Judg. 8:1-4**. Joshua (**Josh. 24:30**) and Jeroboam I (**1 Kings 11:26; 12:20**) were Ephraimites. Whether Hosea knows some other tradition of Ephraim's early superiority, or refers to these, cannot be learned for the text. He simply makes the point that the people whom he now calls Ephraim are pitiful by comparison with the tribe whose name they bear. Their decline and fall is the consequence of worshipping Baal (the singular appears also in **2:8** and possibly **9:10**). The fertility cult of Canaan was the source of Ephraim's guilt and death. The basic covenant requirement of Israel's relation to Yahweh was its rigorous exclusiveness. Yet since coming to the land Israel had worshipped Baal (**9:10**). Hosea sees Ephraim's present condition as the effect of guilt that invokes the death sentence upon itself. After 733 the nation was decimated in territory and population; its wounds and weakness were symptoms enough that it was already in the realm of death.

B. (:2) Present: Persistence in Idolatry

*"And now they sin more and more,
And make for themselves molten images,
Idols skillfully made from their silver, All of them the work of craftsmen.
They say of them, 'Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!'"*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The text abruptly shifts to the **present** ("*and now*"). Israel's unacceptable worship (and, consequently, national life) continues in the historic sin. . .

Kissing the image of the deity evidently was part of ba'al ritual (**1Ki 19:18**). What we have, then, is a quotation of the people that reveals their involvement in these activities (**Macintosh**, 522–24).

H. D. Beeby: There may be in **13:2** a build-up of sarcastic irony. The people sin far more than their primitive forefathers because their culture and technology and craftsmanship enable them to make bigger, better, and more beautiful idols than their competitors. Their industry has now prospered: "No need to import consumer goods. We now make everything ourselves. Look, none of your cheap and nasty idols whose heads may drop off. Only the best! Feel the quality! Solid silver and, mind you, made by experts. Oh yes, we're a developed nation."

Trent Butler: Craftsmen, people whose skills and resources should be dedicated to the Lord, instead dedicate them to false gods and worship what they have created.

Some translations avoid mention of human sacrifice, but we must not back away from the horrendous statement of the text. Human sacrifice was a problem for Israel, especially in desperate days (**Judg. 11:30–40**). The practices clearly violated God's law

(**Lev. 20:2–5**). Israel's love affair turned deadly. They took over not only reverence for Baal as shown by kissing the calf representations of Baal. They also followed other pagan practices—the most horrible of which Hosea condemns here.

J. Andrew Dearman: Who in their right mind would increase activities associated with their demise, as if the description of “*death*” at the hands of Baal in the previous verse was not enough to convince hearers of the continuing threat posed by idolatry? In his sarcasm Hosea draws on the essentials of the first two commandments of the national covenant (**Exod. 20:3–6; Deut. 5:7–10**), both of which are violated by the description of Israelite religious practices here in **Hos. 13:1–2**.

Duane Garrett: Under the leadership of the priests and the royal house, the people treat the images as the proper objects of worship and even debase themselves by kissing calves (referring to calf-idols and not to the actual animals).

Biblehub: This act of kissing is a sign of allegiance and reverence, showing how deeply ingrained idolatry had become in Israelite society. The calves symbolize a false representation of God, leading the people away from true worship. This idolatry is a direct affront to the worship of Yahweh and serves as a type of the ultimate rejection of Christ, who is the true image of God (**Colossians 1:15**).

Allen Guenther: A taunt by some worshiper of the Lord captures their sin in vivid color:
*Sacrificers of people;
They kiss calves.*

God intended animals for sacrifice, people to love and care for. Idolatry has perverted the nation; they have lost their sense of values.

C. (:3) Future: Transitory Passing Away of the Nation – 4 Metaphors

*“Therefore, they will be like the morning cloud,
And like dew which soon disappears,
Like chaff which is blown away from the threshing floor,
And like smoke from a chimney.”*

Allen Guenther: *Therefore* (**13:3**) shifts the reader’s attention to the future judgment. In the previous prophetic speech unit (**12:10-14**), the people were described as without substance. Here their transient and hollow existence occupies four scenes. . . The progress is from the valley mist, to the dew deposited on the ground but quickly evaporated by the summer sun, to the dried chaff of autumn, and finally to the indoor winter fire, foreshadowing judgment. . . Those who trust in the God beyond nature need no idols. They have evidence of the reality of their God in life experiences. The national deliverance from Egypt vindicates those who trust in him.

Trent Butler: The prophetic *therefore* introduces a prediction of disaster, a warning of judgment to come. Israel appeared on the historical scene as an ephemeral entity,

vanishing as quickly as morning mist or early dew. The nation came and went like chaff blowing in the wind or smoke escaping through a window.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Because of its idolatry, the nation has no future. It will pass away. The ephemeral nature of Israel's existence is described using four metaphors: morning mist, dew, chaff, and smoke. The first two also appear in **6:4**, where they portray the shallow commitment of Israel toward God. In **14:5** the metaphor of dew has a different connotation. There God's love is as refreshing as the dew. The chaff (e.g., **Isa 17:13; 41:15**) and smoke (**Isa 51:6**) are symbols of **transitoriness**.

II. (:4-8) PERVERSION OF GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVIDENCE LEADING TO DESTRUCTION – HISTORICAL REVIEW

A. (:4) Testimony of God's Loyal Love to Israel from the Time of the Exodus

*"Yet I have been the LORD your God Since the land of Egypt;
And you were not to know any god except Me,
For there is no savior besides Me."*

H. D. Beeby: Whatever the particular reason for repeating it here, the statement is Hosea's central creed. This is his theological, religious, moral, social, cultural starting point. This is where he begins and what he comes back to: election at the time of the Exodus. Even when he intends the horrors of **vv. 7–8**, this is where he must begin, because for a prophet of Israel there is nowhere else to begin. Israel's history begins here; their *raison d'être* begins here; their philosophy begins here. Above all Israel's security, identity, and very existence are inseparable from God's choosing them and saving them out of Egypt. If ever Israel were inclined to ask "Why is there Israel and not no-Israel," the answer could only begin with "*I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt ...*"

Trent Butler: Israel had no history without God. But they had turned away from him. Having abandoned him as their God, they should expect their history to end.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: In this context, it serves to contrast what has been said of Israel with **Yahweh's constancy**. He has always been with them, and he has always been the same. The fact that Yahweh alone has been Israel's God means that they should know that there is no other whom they should obey or to whom they must turn. This conviction (and demand!) is foundational to the covenantal relationship and is fundamental to the Ten Commandments (**Ex 20:2–3; Dt 5:6–7**). The belief that Yahweh alone can save Israel has enormous implications for national foreign policy. Instead, political leaders are turning to Assyria and Egypt for help instead of trusting him (see esp. **14:3**).

Duane Garrett: This allusion to the husband and wife analogy allows Hosea to develop a final portrait of the denouement of the fertility cult. Metaphorically, Israel's adultery produced a child to whom she cannot properly give birth (**v. 13**, see comments); on a much more gruesome and literal level, the pregnant mothers in Israel will be ripped

open by Assyrian soldiers (v. 16). Mother Israel had sought to obtain children through gods other than Yahweh, and the results were catastrophic.

James Mays: Yahweh begins by proclaiming his own identity as the election-God of Israel (“*your God*”), who is known to his people definitively through the deliverance from Egypt (11:1). This formula of self-presentation was used in Israel’s covenant cult as an introduction to the proclamation of Yahweh’s will for his people (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6) and comes as near as any element of the tradition used by Hosea to stating the central article of his theology. In the decalogic formulations the formula established the right of Yahweh as God of the Exodus and covenant to set his policy for the life of Israel. Here it is the basis for the assertion of Yahweh’s exclusive role as God of Israel. Indeed, v. 4b is a narrative form of the first commandment. Israel is to have no other God than Yahweh because no other deity has participated in its history. “*Know*” means “experience the benefits and presence of another”. The “*helper*” (*mosia*, “*saviour*”) is the one who acts in the time of peril to deliver the people from danger. Israel’s history is revelation that Israel has no other God and that there is no other helper for them. This assertion that Israel is exclusively dependent on Yahweh is in Hosea’s situation a polemic against all other forces to which Israel looked for deliverance: the king and his princes (13:10; cf. I Sam. 10:18f.), military power (14:3), and idols (14:3; 13:2).

B. (:5-6) Tragedy of Israel’s Unfaithfulness

1. (:5) Divine Provision in Difficult Times

*“I cared for you in the wilderness,
In the land of drought.”*

Duane Garrett: The point is that even in the wilderness God so cared for them it was thought they were living in their own pasture land.

John Goldingay: Yahweh’s acknowledging them (v. 5) is an aspect of the rationale for acknowledging Yahweh, to which v. 4 referred. The verb works both ways in Hosea (2:8, 20 [10, 22]; 5:3–4; 6:3; 8:2; 9:7; 11:3). The mutuality in God’s relationship with his people includes his acknowledging them in the sense of recognizing who they are and taking action to see that their needs are met, and their acknowledging him in the sense of recognizing who he is and relying on him rather than on other resources. With God as the subject, the verb appears elsewhere in a sense overlapping with “care for” and “choose,” as here (e.g., Amos 3:2). Ephraim needed Yahweh to acknowledge it in the sense of looking after it on the way through the wilderness, given the conditions there.

2. (:6) Disloyal Forgetfulness in Prosperous Times

*“As they had their pasture, they became satisfied,
And being satisfied, their heart became proud;
Therefore, they forgot Me.”*

John Goldingay: And Yahweh did so, quite extravagantly (v. 6), so that the Ephraimites were full (Exod. 16:8, 12). But being full can lead to elation and thus to disregarding

God or putting God out of mind (**Deut. 8:11–14**). It's what happened (cf. **Hosea 2:13 [15]**). "Luxurious living is . . . risky and difficult to manage, and is, as it were, a slippery path to apostasy from God." Blessing Yahweh safeguards against putting Yahweh out of mind (**Deut. 8:10**), but Ephraim has not done so. Experiencing God's provision easily leads to a happiness that issues in putting God out of mind.

H. D. Beeby; God's gifts became grounds for rebellion. The nurture in the wilderness led o to the gift of land, of milk, honey, vineyard, and pasture. But this wasn't Israel's downfall. The proper response of gratitude, which would have strengthened the knowledge of God and therefore the assurance of security and identity, was not forthcoming. Rather they gave thanks to themselves and to the nonexistent Baals, and finally they forgot God. They travelled the easy road from knowledge to forgetfulness, and as night follows day their doom was sealed; for in their case forgetfulness was not a foible –it was death.

Trent Butler: Israel took everything they could get from God. Once these cattle raisers found grazing ground for their animals, they had everything they wanted. They could dispense with the God who provided those needs. They became proud. The result was predictable. Their proud hearts forgot God. They had no desire for intimacy with the Lord. They became self-sufficient.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Ideally, Israel's and Yahweh's knowing would have mirrored and complemented each other. The proper response always and now at this crucial juncture in history should have been gratitude and devotion to the one true God. But provision brought pride and satisfaction self-reliance (v.6). This danger of arrogant forgetfulness is a recurring theme in Deuteronomy (e.g., **Dt 6:10–12; 8:7–14; 31:20; 32:15–18**).

C. (:7-8) Transition from God as Caring Shepherd to Ferocious Predator

*"So I will be like a lion to them;
Like a leopard I will lie in wait by the wayside.
⁸ I will encounter them like a bear robbed of her cubs,
And I will tear open their chests;
There I will also devour them like a lioness,
As a wild beast would tear them."*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: If v.3 assembled four metaphors to describe how perilous was Israel's future, these two verses use five metaphors to underscore the power and ferociousness of Yahweh in his judgment. . . The verbs are equally robust: lurk, attack, tear open, devour, and mangle.

J. Andrew Dearman: There is a logic to the train of thought in vv. 4–8 that Hosea's first hearers would recognize, namely the activity of the shepherd. As Israel's divine shepherd, YHWH knew Israel in the wilderness and cared for his flock in the land of drought. One of the tasks of a shepherd in a wilderness area is to protect the flock from predators. David's response to Saul, that he had killed both lion and bear in the protection of his father's flock, makes just this point (**1 Sam. 17:34–35**). The

frightening element here is that YHWH has changed from defender of the flock to predator. His theriomorphic portrayal is a way to represent judgment to come in the historical process. The actual predator will be Assyria. Indeed, Hosea's choice of verb in **v. 7b** may be a clever wordplay on the name Assyria. The leopard will keep watch, *'āšûr*, a term that sounds virtually identical to *'aššûr*, "Assyria."

Duane Garrett: The meaning of these lines is self-evident; what is surprising is that Yahweh describes himself in such **ferocious, bestial terms**. Here again we face Hosea's willingness to use language and metaphor that is surprising if not inappropriate to our ears. We should not assume that these similes were acceptable or unremarkable to Hosea's audience, notwithstanding the willingness of other prophets to use similar language (e.g., **Amos 3:4,8; 5:19**). To hear God described as beastly in his brutality—devouring human flesh like a vicious carnivore—is jolting. The purpose of such a depiction is to cut through the foggy notion of an indulgent God that their theology and ritual had given them and so awaken the audience to the reality of divine fury.

Robin Routledge: The imagery here, of being torn apart by wild animals, is relentless. Yahweh, who was their Saviour, will become their destroyer; their shepherd will attack the flock as a predator. In this, there appears to be **progression** (Eidevall 1996: 197–199). The reference to a lion (*šahal*; cf. **5:14**) alerts people to the threat: Yahweh has become their enemy. That threat intensifies with the leopard lurking (*šûr*) by the path, waiting to pounce. Then there is a ferocious attack, this time of a she-bear separated from her cubs, who rips open the chest cavity and exposes the heart. Finally, what is left is devoured by a lioness (*lābî*) and torn apart by wild animals, emphasizing the completeness of the destruction.

Biblehub: The repetition of animal imagery reinforces the theme of unavoidable and violent judgment. Wild beasts in the ancient world were seen as uncontrollable and dangerous, much like the consequences of Israel's disobedience. This phrase serves as a stark warning of the chaos and destruction that result from forsaking the covenant with God. The tearing apart signifies not just physical destruction but also the disintegration of the social and spiritual fabric of the nation.

III. (:9-11) PERVERSION OF MONARCHY LEADING TO DESTRUCTION --- HELPLESS LEADERS

A. (:9) Rejection of Divine Help by the Helpless

*"It is your destruction, O Israel,
That you are against Me, against your help."*

Trent Butler: God had revealed himself as Israel's helper since patriarchal times (**Ps. 37:40**). Now, facing the desperation of Assyrian attacks, Israel stood against the only one who could help. Therefore, Israel would be destroyed.

J. Andrew Dearman: The chilling claim is that Israel's helper is now the agent of the people's demise.

B. (:10-11) Rhetorical Questions Highlighting the Futility of Trusting Human Leaders

1. (:10) Misplaced Trust in Human Leaders

*“Where now is your king That he may save you in all your cities,
And your judges of whom you requested,
‘Give me a king and princes ‘?”*

Allen Guenther: Israel’s king has become the primary symbol of national hope. In a few carefully chosen lines, God unscrolls the sorry history of the monarchy in the Northern Kingdom. The nation resented the insecurity of depending on leaders (judges) whom God chose. So under Samuel, they petitioned for a king “*like other nations*” (1 Sam. 8; 12). Such a leader would be able to fight their battles and provide security for the people (cf. 1 Sam. 8:20). In that respect, their request was a **rejection of God as King**.

Still, the monarchy was a **gracious gift**, a concession to serve a people of little faith. Once established, it would continue if and only if the people and king obeyed God (1 Sam. 12:14-15). Disobedience would set God’s hand against his people. The history of the monarchy, particularly in the north, was one long decline. Apparently, at the time this prophecy was spoken, Israel’s king had been assassinated or deposed: *Where now is your king?* The removal of the king was God’s way of showing the futility of trusting in human resources. That was the act of the One against whom the nation had taken its stand.

J. Andrew Dearman: The ineffectual, if not corrupt, government includes rulers or officials and not just the king himself. Hosea employs the three primary political categories for administrative rule: king (*melek*), ruler or judge (*šōpēṭ*), and prince or official (*šār*). The fate of cities is at stake, indicating a strong threat. The description of governmental failure would fit the presence of a strong external threat to national identity such as Assyria in which the extended royal family and its associates were unable to secure the nation’s sovereignty.

Derek Kidner: Yet God made room for kingship and put it to noble use, as He still does with our bright ideas – or in spite of them. What He could not bless was the arrogance that gave rise to it and the power-struggles that exploited it. We have already seen its corruption in Hosea’s day (7:3-7), and the utter disillusion that marked its downfall (10:3: ‘*a king, what could he do for us?*’). The process by which God took these kings ‘*away in (His) wrath*’ was of their own choosing: a string of assassinations and coups from within, and the punitive might of Assyria from without, in reprisal for repeated acts of treachery.

2. (:11) Monarchy Changes Attributed to God’s Wrath

*“I gave you a king in My anger,
And took him away in My wrath.”*

Biblehub: So in My anger I gave you a king --

This phrase reflects God's response to Israel's demand for a king, which is recorded in **1 Samuel 8**. The Israelites desired to be like other nations, rejecting God as their direct ruler. This request displeased God, as it demonstrated a lack of faith and trust in His leadership. The granting of a king, starting with Saul, was a **concession** to their demands, but it was done in anger because it represented a rejection of God's ideal plan for His people. The historical context shows that Israel's monarchy often led to idolatry and disobedience, which ultimately resulted in divine judgment.

and in My wrath I took him away --

This part of the verse refers to God's judgment upon the kings of Israel, particularly the removal of Saul as king due to his disobedience (**1 Samuel 15:26-28**). It also foreshadows the eventual downfall of the monarchy and the exile of the people. The phrase highlights the consequences of Israel's rebellion and the seriousness of divine wrath. The removal of kings can be seen as a type of Christ, who is the ultimate King that God provides, contrasting with the flawed human kings. This also connects to the broader biblical theme of God's sovereignty and justice, as seen in the removal of leaders who fail to uphold His covenant.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The northern kingdom began with a lack of faith and now will fall because of rebellion. The last decades of its existence were a sad spectacle of political chicanery and ambition, a debilitating series of assassinations and poor policy decisions. Hoshea was the last in that line. In his sovereign judgment, Yahweh will now terminate Israel's royal establishment.

Alternate View:

Duane Garrett: The sense of Yahweh's answer, however, is **ironic**. "*I will give you a king—in my wrath*" means that God will indeed send them a king but not the king that they expect. The king God will send is the ruler of Assyria, who comes as their conqueror. "*And I will take (a king)—in my rage*" means that God will remove the sitting Israelite monarch from his throne.

IV. (:12-16) PUNISHMENT NOW INESCAPABLE – HOPE DESPITE JUDGMENT

A. (:12-13) Summary of Judgment

1. (:12) Catalog of Sins Demanding Punishment

*"The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up;
His sin is stored up."*

H. D. Beeby: In vv. **12** and **13** the direct address to Israel changes to the third person and we leave behind the kings and princes. Nevertheless, the continuity is there. God's indictment of Israel continues. What has changed is that we have moved from the particular to the general: from sins of idolatry, sins of complacency and pride, sins of the sinning kings, to "sin" and "iniquity" (or "guilt"). The verses form a kind of **summary**.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Israel's punishment has been recorded and sealed as on a scroll; it is like a legal document that is preserved. God will not forget what Israel has done (8:13; 9:9); the penalty must be paid (Wolff, 227–28; Mays, 180).

J. Andrew Dearman: At the present time the consequences of Ephraim's iniquity have not yet shown themselves. Perhaps behind Hosea's comparison we can catch something of his detractors among the people. They insist that their actions are not necessarily iniquitous (cf. 12:8 [MT 9]), and in any case have not yet shown the disastrous consequences that Hosea has announced.

Duane Garrett: The only clear analogy to this verse is the seventh vision of Zechariah (Zech 5:5–11), in which the prophet sees a container that is said to contain the “*iniquity in all the land*.” When the cover is removed, he sees a woman named “*Wickedness*” sitting in the container. Angels then seal the container and carry it off to “Shinar” (Babylonia) where a “house” will be built for it. This text is itself subject to various interpretations, but it is fairly certain the idea is that the evil of Israel must be returned to the land of their exile, to a pagan people who would venerate Wickedness as a goddess. That is, the return of exiles to Judah and the building of a temple for Yahweh has as its counterpart the return of iniquity to Babylonia and the building of a temple for her.

John Goldingay: At the moment the waywardness and wrongdoing are bound (v. 12), like a sealed scroll whose contents will eventually be revealed (Isa. 8:16), like water held in a cloud or dam that will eventually burst (Job 26:8), like a woman inescapably pressed and distressed as she prepares to give birth (Jer. 49:22, 24), or like a town besieged by an enemy (1 Kings 8:37). They are hidden away like someone kept safe from trouble (Ps. 27:5) and like the punishment of the wicked (Job 21:19).

Robin Routledge: The emphasis here is on the **inevitability of judgment**. The language may reflect the practice of binding together important documents, or other items of value, and sealing them for secure storage (Isa. 8:16; cf. Jer. 32:14) (Macintosh 1997: 542). In this case, it results in a permanent and inescapable record of Ephraim's culpability.

2. (:13) Childbirth Pains Expressing Unfulfilled Hopes –
Failure in Time of Crisis

*“The pains of childbirth come upon him;
He is not a wise son,
For it is not the time that he should delay at the opening of the womb.”*

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The picture throughout is of an **agonizing birthing process that never comes to fruition**. It is symbolic of the prolonged torment that awaits Israel (Macintosh, 543–45). The unwise son clause is a parenthetical statement that explains why: The nation, the son of Yahweh (cf. 11:1), does not exhibit the godly wisdom that

would have generated proper moral behavior, religious discernment, and political prudence.

J. Andrew Dearman: The issue at hand is to portray the **culpability** of Ephraim, not awareness of fetal senses or lack thereof. Just as Jacob can be typified in the circumstances of birth (**12:3a [MT 4a]**), so too can Ephraim. More to the point is the **potential danger of childbirth**, including especially recognition that once labor begins, a proper sequence of actions is necessary for safe delivery. Ephraim is unwise because he does not present himself at the opening of the womb at the proper time.

Duane Garrett: Ephraim's travail is worse than even normal labor, for (translating literally) “*at the proper time it will not ‘stand’ at the cervical opening.*” While the meaning of “*stand*” in this context is conjectural, the most logical supposition is that this is a **breech delivery**. In everyday life, standing is the posture one assumes prior to walking; in the Israelite language of childbirth, therefore, “*standing*” would seem to describe a fetus coming into position to be born, when it turns and drops down into place prior to coming out the birth canal. Similarly, we can surmise that the phrase “*unwise child*” had a technical meaning in Israelite midwifery for a fetus that was not properly turned or in some other sense was not ready for birth. . .

The text means that Ephraim is like a woman going into labor whose child is breech, such that both the mother and child are likely to die. In Hosea's metaphor both the institutions of Israel (the mother) and her child (the people) are doomed. This is the final end of the fertility cult.

Allen Guenther: When it comes to the time of crisis (*birth, 13:13*), the nation cannot take the appropriate step of repenting and throwing herself in a new dependence on God. The people and their leaders are incapable of changing course. Having come to full term, this child remains in the womb. **Hope has vanished.**

B. (:14) Salvation Promised with Ultimate Defeat of Death = the Last Enemy

*“Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from death?
O Death, where are your thorns?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion will be hidden from My sight.”*

Derek Kidner: [Follows NIV rendering instead]

*I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
Where, O death, are your plagues?
Where, O grave, is your destruction?*

I will have no compassion (NIV).

Is this a ringing challenge to ‘the last enemy’, signalling his doom, or is it (as some would urge) nothing but the last nail in Israel’s coffin? The NIV translation, above, agreeing with the New Testament (**1 Cor. 15:54f.**) and with the older versions as far back as the pre-Christian LXX, takes it as a **great affirmation**, one of the greatest in Scripture. That is, it treats the opening couplet of this verse as a straight promise, exactly as it is written; a promise to be unfolded by our Lord’s great ‘ransom’ saying in **Mark 10:45**. Sadly, the modern trend is to turn it into a question expecting the answer No, and thereby to make the rest of the verse merely a call for the weapons of death to do their worst against Israel.

So it needs to be pointed out that the Hebrew of **14a** does not use the interrogative prefix, but has the form of a plain statement. Sometimes, to be sure, the context of a verse compels us to read a statement ironically or with an interrogative inflexion, and this is why the present verse has suffered this treatment in some recent versions, for the surrounding gloom is certainly profound. But what has been forgotten is that one of the outstanding features of this book is its **sudden changes of tone** from the sternest of threats to the warmest of resolves—most famously in **11:8**. . .

The ‘*compassion*’ which God withholds in the final line is, of course, withheld not from the victims of death and the grave, but from this pair of tyrants themselves. Cf. the personifying of them in **Revelation 20:14**, ‘*Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.*’ In less pictorial terms, **God promises the utter end of death and its dominion**, with no question of His modifying that resolve.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The Lord digresses from the scene of judgment and in **verses 13-14** reminds Israel that restoration, not retribution, is the goal of His sovereign plan for Israel.

Anthony Petterson: The wider context shows that the Lord will not deliver Israel from death, but salvation will come on the other side of judgment. God will have no compassion on his rebellious people when the Assyrian army comes with all its destructive might to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom (cf. **1:6**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: A space is made between these four clauses and the fifth, “*I will have no compassion,*” thus connecting it to the thought of **verse 15**. . .

The essential test of the meaning is in answer to the question, “What did God intend when He inspired these words to be spoken through the prophet Hosea?” I take verse 14 to be another of those **startling flashes of hope** following the grim reality of judgment we have observed throughout Hosea’s prophecy (as in **Hos. 11:8** -- “*How can I give you up, Ephraim?*”). In the case of the nation of Israel, God promises life beyond the death of the Assyrian invasion and destruction, the exile, and suffering. God has plans for His people. There will be a new beginning beyond their deserved death and grave.

But added to that, I sense God serving notice on death as the last enemy. The astounding promise has the ring of a prophetic Messianic hope. And, indeed, from our

perspective, it has been fulfilled in Christ's defeat of death and His victorious resurrection.

Gary Smith: The argumentation in **13:4–16** is that Israel will die. Thus, if Hosea is consistent, one would think this verse is not offering hope. However, at the end of each of the other verdicts in this lawsuit (**6:4; 11:8–9**), God is overcome with love and refuses to totally destroy his people. This is the same passion that refused to give up on Israel and destroy them like Admah and Zeboiim (**11:8**). Hosea **13:14** seems to be a similar bold refusal on God's part to completely reject his people. This taunt of death is based on his redemptive power to overcome the curse of death (**13:14a**). **Death will not defeat God's plans for his people.**

Biblehub: Where, O Sheol, is your sting? --

The "*sting*" of Sheol refers to the pain and fear associated with death and the grave. This imagery is used by Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:55** to describe the defeat of death through Christ's resurrection. The absence of Sheol's sting signifies the hope of eternal life and the removal of death's hold over humanity, a central theme in Christian eschatology.

Alternative View:

M. Daniel Carroll R.: God's plans cannot be thwarted by the destruction coming with the imminent war. The last line is an important reminder that the hope of national restoration does not eliminate the inevitability of judgment; rather, it assures Israel that punishment is neither Yahweh's final dealing with Israel nor the voiding of their covenantal relationship. The juxtaposition of judgment and promise is found elsewhere in the book (e.g., **1:4–2:1; 3:1–5**). . .

These sentences are four questions, all of which reveal the torment in the mind of God. He wrestles with his love for Israel and the necessity of judgment (cf. **6:4; 11:8**). They are, in other words, questions without answers. In the end, however, Yahweh recognizes that wrath must come; **compassion cannot void the judgment**. The nation cannot evade ruin (**Macintosh**, 547–49; cf. **Hubbard**, 222).

C. (:15-16) Severity of Coming Judgment

1. (:15) Like the Devastating Power of the East Wind

*"Though he flourishes among the reeds,
An east wind will come,
The wind of the LORD coming up from the wilderness;
And his fountain will become dry,
And his spring will be dried up;
It will plunder his treasury of every precious article."*

J. Andrew Dearman: What Ephraim intended as political maneuvering will result in the desiccating wind of a victor from the east and the loss of the nation's valuables.

John Goldingay: So for one last time Yahweh declares the **intention to chastise**. We know about the torrid east wind (**v. 15b**; see **12:1 [2]**) coming from the wilderness to the east; only a fool chases it. It can destroy everything in its path. It is, literally, “*a wind of Yahweh*,” and that in two senses. It will be extraordinary, as if it conveys Yahweh’s force. And it actually will convey Yahweh’s force, because it comes as his agent. It will block up the water sources. But “*fountain*” is much more commonly a figurative expression for a wellspring of life (e.g., **Ps. 36:9 [10]**), and “*spring*” can also have this connotation (e.g., **Isa. 12:3**). And wind from the eastern desert is an image for the invader whom Yahweh brings, who comes from that direction (e.g., **Isa. 21:1**), even if approaching Israel from the north. The metaphor then becomes literal reality: Hosea is talking about someone who will come from the east to dry up the nation’s resources.

Gary Smith: Pools of water are emptied by evaporation and overuse by people, and even the springs fail to produce fresh water. As a result, the nation will be stripped of its treasures and will die. This may be interpreted as the loss of agricultural wealth in its storehouses (they will have to eat it all during the drought) or to the Assyrians’ raping of the land when the nation is conquered.

2. (:16) Like the Barbaric Cruelty of Enemy Invaders

*“Samaria will be held guilty,
For she has rebelled against her God.
They will fall by the sword,
Their little ones will be dashed in pieces,
And their pregnant women will be ripped open.”*

H. D. Beeby: The instant threats, judgments, warnings, verdicts, and sentences are about to become actual. The east wind, the plague, the lion, the leopard, the bear are all about Samaria. The outcome of the imminent attack is so predictable that Hosea describes it in graphic and gruesome detail. As often in Hosea, past, present, and future are bound together in a causal bundle (**vv. 1-3**). The past is a history of rebellion; therefore the present generation of adults and children shall be slaughtered, and even the unborn are not exempt. There will be no future for guilty Israel. This time it is both root and branch destruction. The verse begins and ends with the common theme of Israel’s total responsibility for what will happen. Of the three causes – God, Assyria, an Israel – it is the last that is emphasized here. Samaria is guilty because they have rebelled. So the verse begins. And then at the end the theme of culpability returns only slightly disguised. What happens to their own unborn offspring is only what Israel themselves had chosen (**v. 13**) – death in the womb.

Gary Smith: The image of an abnormal childbirth (**13:13**) pictures Israel as a baby in the midst of the birthing process. The pressure of labor contractions is felt by this baby, but the child unwisely refuses to enter the birth canal. Apparently, Hosea sees Israel’s upcoming suffering as analogous to the suffering of this baby. Like the child, Israel is not wise, but has made sinful choices. Although nothing is said about the fate of the breached baby, the implication is that the child (and Israel) will tragically die rather than live. Israel stubbornly rejects the path of life.

Duane Garrett: Yahweh had already in the metaphor of the pregnant woman with the breech baby (v. 13) implied that both mother and child would die. What Yahweh had declared figuratively, the death of mother and child, Hosea now speaks of literally. The final outcome of the fertility cult is the carnage of babies and pregnant mothers throughout the country. The metaphor of Lady Israel and her three children, Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi, has reached its denouement in a slaughter that is anything but literary and symbolic.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is there anything we are allowing to come between us and God so that we are failing to worship God exclusively and supremely?
- 2) Where does the church tend to rely too much on human spiritual leaders and not enough on the invisible Head of the Church?
- 3) Can you track the history of God's faithfulness to you personally and to your family?
- 4) How does God demonstrate both justice and compassion towards the church?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Derek Kidner: If there is one fact about human fortunes which history almost dings into us, it is their **instability**; and historians can show any number of economic, political and other reasons for the changes that turn the giants of one era into the weaklings of the next. Here, not the power-changes abroad nor the factions at home are blamed for the sad state of Ephraim, but a much earlier and subtler shift within the mind: from the Lord to Baal. At that point Ephraim 'died', as surely as Adam did, although like Adam he went on living, to all outward appearance. To make it still more imperceptible, this fickleness had posed as only a broadening of the way in which one served the Lord, as the comments on **chapter 2** have shown. But such pluralism ignored the very first commandment (pointedly alluded to in **verse 4** and previously in **12:9**), and led straight on, by its veneration of idols, to the breaking of the second. There is a powerful jolt administered in **verse 2** by the sudden change of focus, from the spectacle of skilful craftsmen and precious metals to that of the religious idiocy they served. The end of the expensive exercise, one which employed the talents of God's highest creatures, is presented in three scandalized words: '**Humans ('ādām) kiss calves!**'

Lloyd Ogilvie: The impact of **chapter 13** lingers in our souls. We have seen the obdurate obstinacy of helpless people unable to return to God their Helper. Frightening?

Yes! Persistent, willful independence can bring people to the state of not being able to cry out for God's help.

Whenever I finish a study of this alarming chapter, I am reminded of **Isaac Watts's** hymn of trust in God the Helper. It should be a daily prayer for all of us and a declaration of dependence for any church and nation.

*O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home!*

Robin Routledge: The passage begins and ends by emphasizing what the nation was and what it has become because of its failure to acknowledge God. As we see throughout the book, the people have forgotten him, and continue to worship false gods and to put their trust in themselves, their leaders and their military strategy. Through his activity in the nation's history, Yahweh has demonstrated that he alone is their God and Saviour, but the people do not recognize what he has done, and compound their guilt by attributing those blessings to other things. Characterizing this as rebellion emphasizes its seriousness. The people may claim to be devout, but they are, in fact, in wilful defiance of God. This failure to properly appreciate what God has done, and the danger of complacency and self-reliance, remain, albeit at different levels, issues for God's people today.

As a result of Ephraim's sin, judgment is inevitable, and will result, effectively, in the death of the northern kingdom. That, though, is not the final word. Yahweh can redeem his people even from death (**13:14**), opening the possibility of national resurrection and restoration. This, together with **6:2**, probably influenced the development of the Old Testament hope of resurrection to life beyond the grave (**Levenson** 2006: 203–204, 214). It is used in the New Testament (**1 Cor. 15:55**) to emphasize Christ's ultimate victory over death, which he shares with believers who put their trust in him.

Gary Smith: **God's care balanced with justice.**

This verdict of judgment emphasizes God's care and judgment. God's past care was epitomized in his revelation of himself as God to his people, the Exodus experience where he delivered the nation from Egyptian bondage, his care for them during their long and hot desert journey, and his rich provision for all their needs in the Promised Land (**13:4–6**). God's present care is evident in sending the prophet Hosea to warn the people of God's impending judgment and to call the nation to repentance. God's future care will be known after the judgment, for God will ransom some of them from death.

God's care is a minor but important theme of hope in the midst of warnings of darkness and death. He does not just give up when the devastating power of sin ruins his plans. If God's acts of punishment are not understood in the light of his continual caring for his people, people may wrongly misinterpret his action. Judgment does not come because he is too weak to protect his people, because he does not really exist, or because he is a

wrathful judge out for revenge. Punishment and death come because of a prideful, self-centered worldview (**Hos. 13:6b**), because of trusting in a human king and forgetting about God's help (**13:10**), and because of accountability for sin that cannot be put off forever (**13:12**). That God still loves his people and will continue to care for them in the future (**13:14**) undermines any false claims about his love. That God has the ultimate power over life and death is a great assurance to believers in every age (see **1 Cor. 15**).

God's care is balanced with his justice. God is not one or the other, but both. Since guilt for sin must be adjudicated before the bar of divine justice, a verdict of guilty is necessary when sinful rebellion against God exists (**Hos. 13:16**). The results of sin are astonishing and life-threatening; they produce the stench of death. Instead of care and help in times of need, God will take away the rain that brings life to crops and people. Instead of being a Savior from their enemies, God will bring new enemies to kill them with the sword. Sinners will be like defenseless animals ripped apart by a mad mother bear, people who suffer under a foreign king, babies dashed against the ground, and disemboweled pregnant women. People are helpless and hopeless in the grips of death. Only a caring God can ransom people from the deadly results of sin.

Biblehub: Hosea 13 serves as a stern reminder of the severe consequences of abandoning God for transient pleasures. It's a call for introspection, a plea to recognize and acknowledge the one true God. Despite the severity of God's judgement, His unending love and desire for His people to return to Him resonates throughout.

TEXT: Hosea 14:1-9

TITLE: ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND FUTURE BLESSING

BIG IDEA:

**REPENTANCE IS THE PATHWAY TO ENJOYING GOD'S
LOVINGKINDNESS IN RESTORATION AND FRUITFULNESS**

INTRODUCTION:

Biblehub: Hosea 14 is a powerful reminder of God's undying love and His ever-present willingness to forgive and restore. Regardless of how far we may stray, His arms remain open, and His promises of restoration and blessings are steadfast. As the chapter ends, we are reminded that the ways of the Lord are right and the righteous will walk in them.

Hosea 14 is . . . a powerful conclusion that offers a plea for repentance and a promise of divine love and forgiveness. The chapter contains God's invitation to Israel to return to Him, a declaration of His merciful nature, and an assurance of restoration and blessing for a repentant Israel.

H. Ronald Vandermeij: The sovereignty, holiness, justice, and love of God have all worked in unison to achieve the final triumph of God's grace. Just as Hosea personally effected the redemption of his wife (**3:1-3**), so also the Lord in this fourteenth chapter concludes the redemption that will restore His wife, Israel.

Gary Smith: Hosea is not offering a last-minute reprieve from Assyrian defeat but hope after the fall of the nation. God still has plans for those who faithfully serve him and do not trust in the idols of other nations.

The Pulpit Commentary: The foregoing part of this book abounds with denunciations of punishment; this closing chapter superabounds with promises of pardon. Wave after wave of threatened wrath had rolled over Israel and come in unto their soul; now offer after offer of grace is made to them.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: Hosea issued one last plea to Israel—come back home. He pointed Israel in the right direction. “You have missed the way. Sin is destroying you. Turn around and come back home to God.”

MAIN IDEA: Sinners must quit stumbling along the path of sin, find the way back to God in repentance, accept God's loving forgiveness and healing, discard their idols, find new life under God's blessing, and act with wisdom.

H. D. Beeby: The move from **ch. 13** to **ch. 14** is like traveling from one age to another, or even from one world to another. We have become accustomed to Hosea juxtaposing good news with bad news. But nothing quite prepares us for the quick transference

from the darkness of **ch. 13** to the warm and brilliant light of **ch. 14**. And yet, in its own way, the book follows the common pattern of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and even Jeremiah in the Septuagint version, of putting the best news at the end. The pattern is wider even than the message of the prophets. Where we usually speak of night and day, Genesis tells of day and night, Exodus tells of bondage and liberation, and so on. It is almost as though the theme of death/resurrection is present in Scripture wherever we look and that Hosea is only echoing the dominant theme with his own extreme Galilean accent.

I. (:1-3) CALL FOR REPENTANCE AND FAITH = CONDITIONS FOR RESTORATION

A. (:1) Plea for Repentance: Sin Causes Stumbling – Admit Your Guilt

*“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.”*

Derek Kidner: The first word, ‘Return’, is an old friend, a strong feature of the book. Up to now it has brought only disappointment and reproach. Basically it means ‘turn’; and Israel has habitually turned the wrong way. They have been ‘*bent on turning away from me*’, as **11:7** puts it. This, incidentally, was obscured by the older translations that spoke of ‘backsliding’, which has a sound of failure rather than perversity, whereas in fact there had been a flat refusal to respond (**11:5**), born of pride (**7:10**) and of settled preference (‘*their deeds do not permit them to return to their God*’, **5:4**). Any response to the great call, ‘*Come, let us return to the Lord . . .*’, had so far been as shallow as a passing impulse (**6:1, 4**).

But God will not give up – how could He? If their repentance has been shallow, He will deepen it. There is warmth in the emphatic form of the word ‘return’ here (*la*; **verse 2** uses the ordinary form), and the preposition is a strong one. We could almost translate it, ‘*Oh turn, Israel, right back to the Lord.*’ Even the familiar words, ‘*your God*’, have gained a **new intensity** from the threat which Israel’s fickleness had seemed to pose to her marriage-bond with the Lord. Against all deserving, the marriage holds; He is still hers. Here is the costly equivalent of His word to the cuckolded Hosea: ‘*Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour . . . ; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods*’ (**3:1**).

Lloyd Ogilvie: The first step in returning to God is to accept responsibility for departing from Him. When we have stumbled and are flat on our faces, we tend to blame others and circumstances for tripping us. Hosea is very direct in confronting Israel with the undeniable truth, “*You have stumbled because of your iniquity.*” Persistent sin, ‘*āwōn*, that became habitual caused the nation to stumble, *kāšal*. God’s repeated overtures of love, guidance, and blessings were consistently denied.

Allen Guenther: Salvation is a sovereign act of God. The presence of sin demands repentance. The restoring work of God meets experientially with human rebellion and failure in repentance, confession, and forgiveness.

B. (:2) Process of Repentance

1. Must be Verbal and Specific and Directed Personally to the Lord

“Take words with you and return to the LORD.”

Lloyd Ogilvie: They are to have an encounter with the Lord, not with sacrifice offerings, formal rites, and rituals, but with words that expose their true condition before the Lord. The people had tried to substitute sacrifices. *“With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him” (5:6)*. No impersonal ritual will do—the people must *“take words”* that express their deepest selves.

2. Must Ask for Forgiveness

“Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity,’”

3. Must Cast Yourself on the Grace and Mercy of God

“And receive us graciously,”

4. Must Issue in the Fruit of Thanksgiving and Obedience and Service

“That we may present the fruit of our lips”

Derek Kidner: The offering of words, which began with one kind of confession, the acknowledgment of sin, now turns into confession in its other sense, the acknowledgment of God in praise.

C. (:3) Partner of Repentance = Faith in God Alone

H. Ronald Vandermeij: In this third verse, Israel repents specifically of three besetting sins: reliance upon Assyria for salvation, dependence upon Egypt for military aid, and trust in man-made idols for spiritual blessing. Each of those sins drives home the extent to which Israel had rebelled against God in searching for security and blessing (7:11; 8:6; 13:2).

James Mays: The second element of the prayer is a series of vows by which Israel is to declare her total submission to Yahweh. The series is composed of renunciations which forswear the basic sins of court and cult, politics and worship, against which Hosea had repeatedly brought indictment. . . . Yahweh is a God whose compassion (1:6, 8; 2:3, 25) is especially given to those without strength to gain their own rights (Ex. 22:22f.; Deut. 27:19). Israel, now desolate as an orphan, can only appeal to the compassion of a God whose special concern is the helpless.

1. No Hope in Foreign Powers -- Kings

“Assyria will not save us,”

Gary Smith: In the final analysis, political alliances cannot save people, provide true independence, or bring prosperity. Foreign nations are fickle and undependable, the military strength of kings rises and wanes, and such associations require payment of

heavy taxes. There is a better way. Having turned to their covenant God, the people now vow to trust in his power, not war-horses, to control political affairs. God's power is made complete through human weakness. His name is glorified when he brings the victory.

2. No Hope in Military Capabilities -- Armies

"We will not ride on horses;"

H. Ronald Vandermeij: By this statement Israel was finally admitting that the importation of horses from Egypt (begun in the time of Solomon, **1 Kings 10:28**) was in direct rebellion to the command of Moses not to return to Egypt in search of horses (**Deut. 17:16**). To the Hebrews, the horse represented a weapon of war, the multiplication of which signaled a lack of trust in the Lord (cf. **Psalms 20:7; 33:17; Prov. 21:31; Isa. 30:16; 31:1; Amos 4:10**).

3. No Hope in Idols of Any Kind or Our Own Accomplishments -- Cults

"Nor will we say again, 'Our god,' To the work of our hands;"

H. D. Beeby: Kings, army, and cult: what do they have in common, and how have these been responsible for Israel's death? First, they are all institutions and elements in Israel's society. In themselves they are good and valuable, but they exist in a corrupt form and so are pernicious and actually ruinous. On the surface two of them are secular and one is religious, but to Hosea they were all profoundly theological each in its own way and thus able to mislead Israel into ways of death. Three words indicate the common nature of their danger: "security," "adultery," and "idolatry."

Kings, armies, and cults have robbed Israel of their security and identity and made the people into an "orphan." Orphans can do nothing to change their status or role. They are wholly at the mercy of others.

4. Hope in God Alone Who Shows Mercy to the Helpless Sinner

"For in Thee the orphan finds mercy"

Allen Guenther: The concluding line of **Hosea 14:3** is puzzling. What thread of logic ties God's compassion toward the orphan to the promise to keep the second commandment: having no other gods? The connection may come from awareness that Israel's sin is so great and the punishment due them so severe, that only a God of immense compassion would turn and receive them again. If so, the extent of that compassion is marked by God's sensitivity to the voice of the lone orphan crying out for justice.

There is a reading this writer finds even more attractive. On occasions, a Hebrew relative clause may be separated from its antecedent by another element in the sentence. If we read this grammatical construction here, the text would be translated, *Never again will we say to the work of our hands, "Our God, by whom the fatherless experience compassion."* The Israelites, in turning to idols which represent God, have been

addressing the idols as the Lord of the dispossessed and weak. An honest confession acknowledges its absurdity. Hence, Hosea urges the penitents to admit, *How ludicrous, how perverted our sinful ways have been! How could we ever have imagined that a god, created at our workbench, would possess the power and authority to repel oppressors and bring salvation to their victims?*

II. (:4-8) CAUSES OF GOD'S PROMISED RESTORATION AND FRUITFULNESS

A. (:4) Based on the Steadfastness of God's Love and Compassion (Which Overcomes His Anger)

*"I will heal their apostasy,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from them."*

H. Ronald Vandermeij: For God's part (vv. 4-5a), restoration will involve three elements:

- (1) a healing of the apostasy that had separated the nation from God (cf. **Exod. 15:26**);
- (2) a gracious gift of love that freely forgives all sin (cf. **Rom. 3:24**); and
- (3) a renewal of the blessings on the land that will be poured out like the dew.

S. Lewis Johnson: **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** whom I often quote has a sentence with which he begins one of his studies on the 14th chapter of Hosea that I'd like to use as a kind of **theme text**. **Mr. Spurgeon** says, "This sentence, *I will love them freely*, is a body of divinity in miniature. He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can dive into its fullness is a true master in divinity." Now, after over 35 years of teaching in theological institutions, that text that **Mr. Spurgeon** has begun his study with, I can say is true to the facts of theological life. This sentence is a body of divinity in miniature, and in fact, if you could come to an understanding of it, if you're not already in understanding of it, you would have a body of theology in miniature. If you would understand its meaning, you would be a theologian. And if you could dive into its fullness, you would be worthy of a master of theology degree. . .

What does it mean, to love freely? Well, it means to love with perfect spontaneity. It means to love apart from outside restraint. It means to love with no inducement whatsoever. In other words, we're to love because he loves. To love sovereignly, the source of the love exists in God himself and not in man. There is no inducement from man. It is a sovereign love. It's a free love. . .

You see, there are two great things that one must remember here. There is nothing in man to attract the love of God to man for the simple reason that his love existed before there was a man. The love of God is everlasting love. And man issues at a later date. His love is eternal. We are not eternal. His love is eternal, everlasting.

And there is nothing in man that can be effectual hindrance to his love. Can you think of any sin that can keep you from the experience of the love of God if God has

determined to set his love upon you? There is no sin. Otherwise, God wouldn't be sovereign. You see, man would be sovereign. Man's sin would overcome God. We'd say, Ah, you see, there is a man who committed such a sin that he has finally overcome God and his magnificent grace. There is no such thing.

His love is a sovereign love, and his love overcomes all obstacles, and ultimately brings its objects into relationship with him. Scripture says, "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.*" But our friends would like to have us interpret that as "*I will have mercy on whom I can have mercy.*" There's a theological degree's difference between those statements. *I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.* That's Scripture.

B. (:5-7) Based on the Supply of God (Which Promotes Growth, Beauty and Reputation)

H. Ronald Vandermeijer: In picturing the beauty of the fruit that Israel will cultivate in her new relationships to God (**Isa. 62:3; Jer. 32:41; Zeph. 3:16-17; Zech. 9:16-17**), Hosea employs much of the imagery that is found in the love song of the Hebrews, the Song of Solomon:

- the lily – emphasizing Israel's newfound beauty and purity
- cedars of Lebanon – strength and stability – deeply rooted
- sprouts on the shoots – new life
- olive tree – usefulness – used not only domestically but also in foreign trade
- fresh fragrance
- blossom like the vine
- wine of Lebanon – celebrated for its aroma, flavor, and medicinal restorative properties

Derek Kidner: Without labouring the details, we can gain from this a threefold impression of Israel revived and reconciled to God.

- First, **freshness** (dew, flowers, fragrance, beauty, shade);
- secondly, **stability** (rooted like the poplar, perhaps; or like Lebanon; **verse 5**);
- thirdly, **vigour** (the spreading shoots of new growth, **verse 6**; the '*corn in abundance*', **verse 7**, NEB).

1. (:5) Providing Nourishment for Growth, Beauty and Reputation

*"I will be like the dew to Israel;
He will blossom like the lily,
And he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon."*

Allen Guenther: God is the source of Israel's life. Dew appears mysteriously from clear skies, unlike rain, which was thought to be brought by the storm god, Baal. God can supply Israel's needs from apparent nothingness.

2. (:6) Fostering Growth, Beauty, Fragrance

a. Growth

"His shoots will sprout,"

b. Beauty

“And his beauty will be like the olive tree,”

c. Reputation

“And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.”

3. (:7) Restoring Growth, Beauty and Reputation

a. Growth

“Those who live in his shadow Will again raise grain,”

b. Beauty

“And they will blossom like the vine.”

Allen Guenther: Israel’s splendor shall be restored when the people return to the land. Three conjoined clauses depict her majesty. Each represents the beauty of a vital and magnificent plan.

- -Israel is frequently depicted as a **vineyard** or grapevine (cf. **Ps. 80:8-18; Is. 5; Jer. 2:21; 12:10; Ezek. 19:10-14**). Like a vine which grows anew from the buds each year, her new growth shall shoot out. In the Hebrew plant classification, the vine was regarded as a tree (**Judg. 9; Ezek. 15, 17**).
- The reestablished nation may also be compared to the **olive tree**. It provides a staple food (vegetable oil), is highly productive, remains attractively green year-round, and is capable of surviving even in extended periods of drought.
- The third tree with which Israel may be compared is the fragrant **cedar of Lebanon**. Its pleasing aroma refreshes body and mind. It envelopes the bystander with its beauty.

c. Reputation

“His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.”

**C. (:8) Based on the Sufficiency of God
(Which Should Eliminate Any Inclination Towards Idols)**

“O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?

It is I who answer and look after you.

I am like a luxuriant cypress;

From Me comes your fruit.”

John Goldingay: The first colon puts on Ephraim’s lips a commitment about idols that contrasts with **4:17; 8:4; 13:2**. The second colon expresses Yahweh’s claim about his action that would justify that response. He had asserted that he would restore his people, and he will have done so.

J. Andrew Dearman: The book began with the charge that the land committed harlotry in disobedience to YHWH (**1:2**). The charge of Israel’s faithlessness continued, including the description of the land ill and in mourning (**4:1–3**). Now the book comes

to a penultimate conclusion here in **14:4–8** with an eschatological projection of Israel healed and loved, fruitful in the land under YHWH's shadow and secure in the provisions of his care.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: God's description of himself surprises us. He is a **pine tree** in whom Israel's fruitfulness is found. The pine tree symbolized divinity, kingship, and fertility in Israel's world. God set himself up as the only true reality behind such symbolism. Now Israel had to decide. Did she believe the Lord? Did she want healing? Would she return and repent and seek forgiveness?

(:9) CLOSING CHARGE – UNDERSTAND AND OBEY THE WAYS OF THE LORD

A. Understand

*“Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
Whoever is discerning, let him know them.”*

Gary Smith: The danger is that people will read what Hosea has said and not understand it, miss the subtle nuances of his bold analogies, or be offended by his metaphors. The reader must not let the difficulty of his poetry, the theology of judgment for sins, or the hopeful passages close his or her mind to the message of this book.

Although misinterpretation is always a danger, a more common problem is to understand the words but be unmoved by their meaning. Hosea exhorts the wise person to realize and fully comprehend the implications and significance of what God has revealed. Internalizing the truth of God's Word is one of the wisest things anyone can do. People must be open to the convicting power of the Spirit and be constantly asking how Hosea's words apply to their lives.

B. Obey

*“For the ways of the LORD are right,
And the righteous will walk in them,
But transgressors will stumble in them.”*

Robin Routledge: The language reflects wisdom traditions. The contrast between those who do and those who do not follow the right path is a common theme in wisdom texts (**Prov. 10:29; 16:17; 21:8**). It also recalls the choice set before the people in Deuteronomy (e.g. **Deut. 30:15**). Walking in Yahweh's ways is another closely related Deuteronomistic theme (**Deut. 30:16**; cf. **10:12; 11:22; 28:9**), and the verse is also similar to **Deuteronomy 32:29**. It draws, then, on both wisdom and covenant traditions to encourage the discerning reader to choose the path of obedience to Yahweh, which leads to life. By contrast, those who rebel against him and his words will stumble and fall.

Lloyd Ogilvie: The epilogue of **verse 9** serves as a conclusion to the whole prophecy of Hosea but also provides us with the final step of returning to and remaining in

fellowship with God. The wise and prudent and righteous person has discovered that “*the ways of the Lord are right.*” There are only two ways to live—to walk in the ways of the Lord or to stumble over them. And the only way to walk in the way of the Lord is to surrender our will to Him. When we trust Him each step of the way, He will reveal His will and give us the courage to obey.

M. Daniel Carroll R.: The last words in Hosea's book (*the rebellious stumble in them*) form an artistic inclusio with the same thought in **Hosea 14:1** (HCSB “*You have stumbled in your sin*”; NIV “*Your sins have been your downfall!*”), giving a frame to this concluding chapter. Foolish Israel stumbles through life sinning and following any path but God's. They can display their wisdom only by hearing the prophetic call to repent, turning away from their path of sin, and turning to God for forgiveness. That for Hosea is righteousness.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the steps to genuine repentance and how is repentance differentiated from mere remorse?
- 2) Are our words and actions aligned with true discipleship?
- 3) How would you contrast God's Garden of Blessing with Baal's Empty Promises?
- 4) How is God challenging you through the message of Hosea to become more faithful and loyal in your worship?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Goldingay: The imperative in **14:1 [2]** signals the beginning of a section, which constitutes Hosea's **closing exhortation** to Ephraim, but this closing section is dominated by **promises** about how fruitful Ephraim's life will be as it responds. The final bidding thus leads into some final promises, and the themes and motifs from earlier in the scroll recur here as the scroll draws to an end.

H. D. Beeby: The **divine ambivalence** which meets us everywhere in the book is how human understanding sees the all-comprehending God, and this meets us in many places in Hosea. Only when we arrive at the last chapter do we see the ambivalence at its clearest, because it is here that the true heart of God is most fully revealed – revealed in a movement away from what human eyes see to be its opposite. This is not so much a movement within God; God moves because he is moving Israel on a journey from death to life. The movement is a redemptive journey which reveals the ambivalence at

its clearest but also fills it with most meaning because the movement is the giving of life.

David Thompson: IF GOD’S PEOPLE, WHO HAVE STUMBLER AND MADE A MESS OF THINGS, WILL RETURN TO THE LORD, THEY WILL RECEIVE GOD’S GRACE, MERCY, FORGIVENESS, LOVE AND BLESSINGS.

There can be a new beginning in the relationship with God. No matter how sinful or perverted you have been, God invites you to return to Him. In fact, if you don’t there is something wrong with you. Most logical people who realize they have been going the wrong direction make a fast decision to get going in the right direction.

For example, when you travel, if you realize you missed your exit and are going the wrong way, you immediately turn around to go the right way.

No person in his right mind just continues to go the wrong way, when he knows he is going the wrong way. So it should be with God’s people. Once you have experienced the devastation and the consequences of moving in the wrong direction, the quicker one in his right mind will want to turn back to God. Unfortunately for Israel, this did not happen and still has not happened.

Israel is not fully in her land. She is not flourishing in her land. She does not have peace in her land. She does not have righteousness reigning in her land. You would logically think someone in that nation would say, “You know, maybe we better return to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.” You would think this, but that is not what is happening.

There are four final, last ditch wrap up points Hosea makes as he brings this book to a conclusion:

WRAP UP POINT #1 – If God’s people will return to the Lord, they will find God’s forgiveness, grace and mercy. **14:1-3**

WRAP UP POINT #2 – If God’s people will return to the Lord, they will find God’s anger will be replaced by God’s love, healing and blessing. **14:4-7**

WRAP UP POINT #3 – God’s people need to realize God is the One who cares for His people. **14:8**

WRAP UP POINT #4 – One who is wise and discerning will return to the Lord and pursue an understanding and application of God’s Word. **14:9**

Let’s remember how this book started; Hosea married a prostitute who loved her sin and loved her immorality. She was not faithful to her husband. She did not care about her husband’s feelings and yet Hosea went and took her back.

This is the story of Israel and frankly this is the story of us. We have all wandered off the path of righteousness and God comes and says come back to Me.

This book ends with exactly where the focus of one serious about God should be—the Word of God. People who want to return to a relationship with God need to get serious about God’s Word. Not just reading it, but “understanding” it. People who are serious about their relationship with God are serious about carefully understanding the Word of God.

The reason why they want to understand it is so they may apply it. They want to learn the righteous ways of God so they may walk in those righteous ways. Now you may be here today and your life has been a disastrous mess. Turn back to Him. Come back to Him. Confess the sin and pursue understanding God’s Word and God will bless you. That is the book of Hosea.

Jason Van Bommel: Thankfully, **Hosea 14** gives us clear instructions on how to return to the Lord, along with loving and compelling reasons to do so. God tells us how to pray:

1. Pray for forgiveness: "*Take away all iniquity*"
2. Plead for God's goodness: "*Receive us graciously*" (I'm following the KJV, NASB, and NIV here)
3. Resolve and pledge to obey the Lord: "*We will pay with bulls the vows of our lips*" 4. Turn away from trusting in the world: "*Assyria shall not save us*"
5. Reject idolatry: "*We will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands*"
6. Trust in the goodness of God: "*In you the orphan finds mercy*"

This is a wonderful pattern of prayer, whenever we come under conviction for sin or realize we have been trusting in worldly things or idols of our hearts and minds. God promises to answer this kind of prayer: "*I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely*".

Jeremy Thomas: The Future Restoration of Israel

Hos 14:1-3 is the **confession of the nation**. It is the future confession of the nation Israel. This is yet to occur. But remember when you discuss confession of sin, you first have to have **conviction of sin**; if you’re not convicted of sin you have nothing to confess. This is why it does no good to go around confessing when you don’t know what it is you are confessing. . .

So the conclusion is that finally Hosea shows us that the word of God in Hosea lays out principles for those who are wise, those who pay attention to the word of God and respond. They may be justified and wobbling all over the place, but through time and study of the word and coming to understand the word they are sanctified and they start lining up with these straight paths. But the rebel who takes his stand in defiance against God and His Christ winds up worse and worse until he totters and stumbles completely over the word of God. And with that Hosea’s book comes to an end.

Thomas Constable: Parallels Between Hosea and Gomer / and Yahweh and Israel

Hosea and Gomer	Yahweh and Israel
Hosea marries Gomer (1:3).	Yahweh is betrothed to Israel (2:19).
Hosea is a faithful husband (3:3).	Yahweh is a faithful "husband" (1:7).
Hosea's love is not returned (3:1).	Yahweh's love is not returned (3:1).
The relationship disintegrates (3:1).	The relationship disintegrates (2:2).
Gomer pursues other men (3:1).	Israel pursues other gods (4:1).
Gomer is indifferent to Hosea's feelings (3:1).	Israel is indifferent to Yahweh's feelings (11:1).
Hosea has a daughter whose name, Lo-Ruhama, means "Not Loved" (1:6).	Yahweh will not have pity on His wayward children in Israel (5:6).
Hosea has a son whose name, Lo-Ammi, means "Not My People" (1:9).	Yahweh declares that the Israelites are not His people (1:9).
Hosea redeems and restores physically adulterous Gomer (3:2).	Yahweh redeems and restores spiritually adulterous Israel (14:4-8).

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