

Lessons on Hosea

Eric Hall

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Preface

These 47 lessons on the book of Hosea were taught by Eric Hall at the Fulshear church of Christ in Fulshear, Texas, between September 17, 2023, and August 25, 2024. The handouts and other materials referenced in these notes are available at www.StudyHosea.com, along with audio and video copies of all the lessons. You can also find a contact page at that website if you have any questions or comments. And please let me know about any typos that you spot!

Lesson 1

Hosea is a strange book

On one hand, Hosea is not strange at all. It contains some of the best known verses in the Bible.

Hosea 1:10 - And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

Hosea 4:6 - My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.

Hosea 8:7 - For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

Hosea 11:1 - And out of Egypt I called my son.

But, despite the comfort of those well-known verses, anyone who undertakes a study of the book of Hosea is immediately confronted with one of the strangest commands found anywhere in the word of God: “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom!”

And the strangeness doesn't end there! Hosea's wife, Gomer, has three children (perhaps all with Hosea, and perhaps not), and God commands Hosea to give them strange names: first, a son he names **Jezeel** (which is somehow related with King Jehu, who died a half century before Hosea started preaching); second, a daughter that he names **Not Loved**; and finally another son that he names **Not Mine**.

And that's all just within the first nine verses of the book!

And what about the remaining 188 verses in the book? Do they clear everything up? Well, here is how one commentary describes the remainder of the book:

The book swiftly plunges into a maze of warnings, microsermons, poems, and laments, and through them all it swiftly and evasively alludes to biblical texts and incidents, mixes metaphors, and changes topics, seemingly at random.

In short, we have our work cut out for us! I hope we are all ready for a challenge!

And if we think the book of Hosea is strange, just imagine for a moment how strange it was to Hosea himself!

Other prophets were given strange commandments by God. Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days and eat bread baked over human dung in Ezekiel 4. Isaiah was commanded to walk naked and barefoot for three years in Isaiah 20. But I suspect that on some days (and perhaps on many days), Hosea would have been happy to swap commands with Ezekiel or Isaiah!

As we study the book of Hosea, we need to see these events and hear these proclamations as Hosea himself and his listeners saw them and heard them. In fact, as we will see, that was why the book of Hosea was given to us in the first place.

God wanted his people to see themselves through Hosea's eyes. God wanted them to see what was happening to Hosea in his relationship with his new wife and to understand something about their own relationship with God.

Later in the introduction we will consider perhaps the hardest question about Hosea - what is the structure of this book? Many suggest there is no structure, but I think we will answer that question differently. I think we will see that this book has an elaborate structure that is based on the people we meet in the first nine verses. But more on that later.

Hosea is a difficult book

Apart from the difficulty of discerning a structure to the book, Hosea is difficult for many other reasons as well. Here is how one commentator describes the difficulty of this book:

Hosea contains possibly the most difficult Hebrew in the Bible (although many scholars would give that distinction to Job). Hosea is frequently elliptical, at times apparently ungrammatical, and often contains passing allusions to historical incidents and other texts of the Bible that are almost bewildering. Its logic is sometimes paradoxical. It also contains a fairly high number of obscure or rare words, the meanings of which scholars must struggle to recover.

And sometimes it appears that the book of Hosea is **intentionally** difficult and obscure! And, yes, that is what I mean - not just obscure, but deliberately obscure!

And when that happens, we have two problems. First, we need to solve the problem creating the obscurity if we can, but second, we then need to explain why the book intentionally obscured something! Let's look at an example.

Hosea 11:8 - How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like **Admah**? How can I treat you like **Zeboiim**? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

Who or what are Admah and Zeboiim? We can answer that question with a quick search of the Bible:

Genesis 10:19 - And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, **Admah**, and **Zeboiim**, as far as Lasha.

Deuteronomy 29:23 - The whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of

Sodom and Gomorrah, **Admah**, and **Zeboiim**, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath.

Admah and Zeboiim were cities near Sodom and Gomorrah that were apparently destroyed at the same time as Sodom and Gomorrah, although neither Admah nor Zeboiim is mentioned explicitly in Genesis 19.

Genesis 19:25 - And he overthrew those cities, **and all the valley**, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

So, now back to Hosea 11:8. If the verse had said, “How can I make you like Sodom? How can I treat you like Gomorrah?” we would have had no trouble at all understanding the point. But the verse doesn’t say that. Instead, it asks, “How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?”

It is very hard to see verse 8 as anything but deliberately obscure. Should that worry us? Not at all. Jesus was also sometimes deliberately obscure.

Mark 4:10-12 - And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that ‘they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.’”

John 6:53 - Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

The occasional deliberate obscurity should not worry us, but we do need to figure out the reason for it - and there is always a reason for it!

And the most common reason? I think the most common reason for a deliberate obscurity is that it makes the listener think. But, whatever the reason, the obscurities remain, and we have to figure them out - and Hosea is full of them! In fact, one thing we will

discover very quickly about the book of Hosea is that it places very high demands on the reader!

Think back over your own educational background. Did you ever have a teacher or a textbook that held your hand each step of the way, that really took its time, and that went over topics again and again? And did you ever have a teacher or a textbook that took the opposite approach - that did not hold your hand, that threw you in the deep end with a command to swim, that never said the same thing twice, that went along at a gallop and expected you to keep up? In which course did you learn the most? Hosea is firmly in the second category.

Hosea is very light on explanation! Jerome described the situation well: “Hosea is concise, and speaks in detached sentences.” And another: “Conciseness, combined with a fulness of meaning which needs much expansion to be intelligible, occasions perplexity and confusion.”

And there are other reasons why Hosea is difficult. One source of difficulty in Hosea is the imagery that it uses. We will see many very striking images in this book.

- In 4:16, Israel is like a stubborn calf.
- In 6:4, the people’s love is like the morning dew that vanishes quickly.
- In 7:8, Ephraim is a half-baked cake.
- In 7:11, Ephraim is like a silly and senseless bird that flutters between Assyria and Egypt.
- In 9:16, Ephraim is a diseased and dried-up plant that bears no fruit.
- In 13:13, Ephraim is a baby too unwise to be born.

Sometimes the imagery in Hosea turns on a Hebrew wordplay. Hosea, it seems, was very fond of puns!

- In 12:11, the altars in Gilgal are as “heaps of stones (gallim).”
- In 10:5, Beth-el, “the house of God” has become Beth-aven, “the house of vanity.”

Those puns are impossible to appreciate in our English translations.

At other times Hosea turns the images in unexpected directions.

For example, in 7:4, the people are like a heated oven because of their adultery, but a few verses later in 7:8 the people are like an unturned cake in that oven.

We will also see many different portraits of God in this book.

- God is like a husband in 2:2.
- God is like a father in 11:1.
- God is like a physician in 14:4.
- God is like a fowler in 7:12.
- God is like a lion and like a leopard in 13:7.
- God is like a bear in 13:8.
- God is like dew in 14:5.
- God is like a green tree in 14:8.
- God is like a moth and like dry rot in 5:12.

We will also see statements in this book that on the surface might seem self-contradictory.

For example, in 13:14, God promises to ransom and redeem the people, but a few verses later he says, “their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”

How do we handle such verses? The answer is that we do with them what we do with the paradoxes in the New Testament. We find the truth behind the apparent paradox.

For example, in 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul writes, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” That sounds like a paradox, until we realize that Paul is weak in one sense while strong in another sense.

Likewise with Jesus’ statement in Matthew 20:16 - “So the last will be first, and the first last.” Again, that sounds like a paradox until we realize that it is those who are last in one sense who will be first in another sense. There are no contradictions in the Bible.

Another potential source of difficulty in Hosea are the places that he mentions. Like a geography teacher, Hosea takes his listeners from place to place reminding them of their history.

- (9:10) But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.
- (9:15) Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them.
- (10:9) From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah?

Our task is to keep up as Hosea moves from place to place!

Another feature of Hosea that can present some difficulties for us is how closely the book is tied back into the Law of Moses. Over and over again, Hosea points us back to the books of Moses.

- Hosea 1:10 refers to the promise to Abraham in Genesis 22
- Hosea 2:18 refers to the creation in Genesis 1
- Hosea 6:7 refers to the sin of Adam in Genesis 3
- Hosea 11:8 refers to the destruction of the cities in Genesis 19
- Hosea 12:3 refers to events in the life of Jacob

We could add to that list numerous references to the Exodus, along with allusions to the curses in Deuteronomy 28.

Most significantly, the foundation of the book of Hosea is based on the frequent depiction of apostasy as whoredom found elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Exodus 34:13-15 - You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and **when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods** and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, **and their daughters whore**

after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

Leviticus 17:7 - So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, **after whom they whore**. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.

Deuteronomy 31:16 - And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and **whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering**, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.

Why do all of those Old Testament references create a difficulty for us? Because Hosea doesn't exactly hold our hand here! Instead, Hosea knows the Old Testament, and Hosea expects us to know it as well, and to follow his arguments when he alludes back to these other events. Sometimes we will need to work very hard to keep up with Hosea and his rapid-fire arguments!

Hosea is a difficult book that makes great demands on us, and we will need to proceed very carefully.

Hosea is a heart-breaking book

We cannot read this prophecy without tears in our eyes and an ache in our hearts.

Few books of the Bible are more emotional than the book of Hosea.

In the message of Hosea we see the passion of God. We see the jealousy of God, the commitment of God, the heartbreak of God, the enthusiasm of God, the love of God. People often talk about what they feel about God. Hosea tells us what God feels about us.

Sometimes we are tempted to view God as a giant computer that operates only with a cold emotionless logic like Mister Spock. We know that view of God is false, and one of the best pieces of evidence

against that false view (especially in the Old Testament) is the book of Hosea.

This book is heart-breaking, both from the perspective of Hosea and, more importantly, from the perspective of God.

How does God feel about his people? How does God feel when his people reject him in favor of another? How does God feel when he pleads with his people to return? And how does God feel when he hears the response of his people to those pleas? How does God feel when his people turn their back on him? Does God ever feel hurt? Hosea answers all of those questions.

The book of Hosea reveals God's heart to us. This book is proof of the old adage that it is the people you love the most who can hurt you most.

If I ever wonder whether the eternal architect of the universe really knows me and personally loves me, then I need to read the book of Hosea.

From a New Testament perspective, we know that God's love is revealed perfectly in Christ. God sent Jesus because God loved us (John 3:16). The inexpressible gift of 2 Corinthians 9:15 is a result of inexpressible love. We know that God loves us, but we often struggle to understand it. How could God love us so much that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)?

Where can we turn for help in understanding God's love? One place is this book of Hosea. Hosea helps us understand why the Bible doesn't end with the curse in Malachi. Hosea helps us understand Matthew 1. Hosea helps us understand what it means for the church to be the bride of Christ.

But God's emotions are not the only emotions we see in Hosea. We also see Hosea's emotions, and, as we will see, God is revealing himself to us through what happens to Hosea in this book. We are intended to learn something about God from what we will learn about Hosea the prophet.

And one way to do that will be to put ourselves in Hosea's shoes.

How does Hosea feel when, as a young man, God commands him to marry a prostitute? How does Hosea feel when his children are born, and when he is forced to wonder whether they are his? And

how does Hosea feel when he is commanded to give them names that he knows will cause others to wonder about whether his children are really his? How did Hosea feel when he hears the whispers of those around him each time he walks past?

One of the commentaries on Hosea I saw this past week was entitled “The Cross of Hosea,” and that is certainly a thought-provoking title. We know that we are each told by Jesus to take up our cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23). If we want an example of what that means we can find one here in the Old Testament with Hosea.

As we study this book of Hosea, let’s keep in mind something very important about Hosea the person - he was a real person, with real emotions, with real faith, and with, no doubt, many questions. Let’s never lose sight of Hosea the man and of his strange little family - Hosea, Gomer, Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine. They were real people, and let’s not forget that.

And there is an even more important reason not to lose sight of Hosea’s strange little family as we study this book, and it is this: in a sense, we are that strange little family! The church is God’s “peculiar people”! (1 Peter 2:9) We are not the family that many in the world would expect God to have.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 - For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

We in the family of God have some things in common with those in the family of Hosea, so let’s be on the lookout for that as we study this book.

Hosea is a wonderful book

Despite its odd beginning, the great themes of the Bible are all on full display in Hosea. Two key themes of this book are the love of

God and the grace of God - and those are also key themes of the entire Bible.

Although the book is heart-breaking, Hosea does not present that sorrowful condition as a permanent condition. Instead, another of the key themes in Hosea is reconciliation.

We see this theme in the opening verse of the book. The name “Hosea” means deliverance or salvation.

Yes, the relationship had been shattered, but the relationship would be restored - both between God and his wayward people and between Hosea and his wayward wife.

We will see this beautiful theme of reconciliation all throughout this book.

- **(1:10)** And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”
- **(2:23)** And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”
- **(3:5)** Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.
- **(11:8–9)** My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.
- **(14:4–7)** I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Over and over again, the New Testament turns to Hosea to show us things about Christ and about his church.

When Paul in Romans 9:25-26 wants to show us that the Jews (like the Gentiles) stand in need of the mercy of God, he quotes Hosea.

Hosea 1:10 - Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

Peter alludes to the same verse when he gives his great description of the church in 1 Peter 2.

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

When Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:4, says that Jesus "was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures," he almost certainly had a verse from Hosea in mind.

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

Later, in that same chapter of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul in verse 56 again refers to Hosea.

Hosea 13:14 - I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

Jesus quotes a verse in that same chapter of Hosea in Matthew 9:13.

Hosea 6:6 - For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Matthew 2:15 tells us that Jesus' flight to Egypt as a child was prophesied by Hosea.

Hosea 11:1 - When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

So, we know with certainty that in our study of Hosea we will see Jesus, we will see the church, and we will see the gospel.

Lesson 2

An Objection

It is at this point in our study that we are most likely to hear a loud objection from a modern scholar of the Bible.

Why? Because their entire approach to the Old Testament is premised on the “fundamental presupposition” that nothing written in the New Testament can ever be used to shed any light on what is meant by a verse in the Old Testament. Here is how one critic describes the situation:

The goal of historical criticism is to uncover the original meaning of a document in its original historical setting. A fundamental presupposition is that nothing from a subsequent era can be used to help explain a text. Documents need to be read entirely within their own historical contexts. This means the NT cannot be used to illuminate the OT; there must be a firewall between the two.

Well, how can we tell if a commentary has or has not adopted that approach? That’s easy. Just pick an Old Testament passage that you know is explained in the New Testament, and then see what that commentary does with it.

For example, consider the great prophecy of Joel 2 that Peter quotes in the first gospel sermon in Acts 2 on the day the church was established. I can point you to a commentary on Joel that, in its comments on Joel 2, says not a single word about Peter or about Acts 2, not even in a footnote!

Such a commentary is virtually worthless! (I say “virtually” only because sometimes a blind pig will in fact find an acorn!) How can we or anyone else ever hope to understand Joel 2 if we ignore Acts 2?

That modern “firewall” approach to the Old Testament is a wrong approach. It denies two major doctrines about the word of God - the divine inspiration of the Bible and the unity of the Bible.

The Bible is a unified whole that we have been given by God, and if we ignore the New Testament when we study the Old Testament then we are ignoring the very best commentary - a commentary from God himself!

And, of course, we cannot believe the New Testament and, at the same time, believe it has nothing to tell us about the proper interpretation of the Old Testament. Why? Because Jesus himself tells us that the Old Testament is all about him!

Luke 24:27 - And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

John 5:39 - You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

John 5:46 - For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

Acts 3:18 - But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.

Acts 3:24 - And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.

Acts 10:43 - To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 13:27 - For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.

Acts 13:29 - And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Acts 18:28 - For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

The New Testament tells us over and over again that the Old Testament is all about Christ, about the church of Christ, and about the gospel of Christ.

Under the modern liberal view, Christ vanishes from the Old Testament. We know that view is false for the simple reason that the New Testament tells us repeatedly to look for Jesus in the Old Testament, and when we do, we find Jesus on every page of the Old Testament!

Who was Hosea?

In one sense, that is a simple question for the reason that there isn't much we can say about it. We know very little about Hosea's background beyond the name of his father, which verse 1 tells us was Beeri.

But, of course, in one respect, we know more about Hosea than we know about most of the other prophets - we know the names of his wife and the names of his children!

From his book, we also know that Hosea was well educated and thoroughly knowledgeable of the Scriptures as they existed in his day.

But there is much we do not know about Hosea. We don't know when or where he was born or when or where he died. We don't know if he was plugged into the circles of power like Isaiah was.

We have evidence that Hosea was a young man at the beginning of his ministry. First, that he was not yet married suggests he was a young man. And second, that Hosea's ministry lasted from Jeroboam II (in the north) to Hezekiah (in the south), as we see in verse 1, also likely suggests that Hosea was a young man when his ministry began due to the length of that time period.

Well, how long was that time period? How long was it between the end of Jeroboam II's reign and the beginning of Hezekiah's reign? If we can figure out that number, then that will be the **minimum** period of Hosea's ministry based on what we read in verse 1.

That sounds like a simple question, but it is not. In fact, in asking that question we are nibbling at the edges of one of the most difficult and contentious areas in the study of the Old Testament - the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel.

What makes it all so difficult? Well, let's see! Let's see if we can figure out when Jeroboam II's reign came to an end.

One of the fixed and well-attested dates in Hebrew history is the year 841 BC. That was the year when Jehu (whom we will meet before we get out of the first chapter of Hosea!) assassinated two kings - King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah.

We know the exact year due to a very famous archaeological discovery - the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, which is on display at the British museum and is shown on the handout for Lesson 2. That obelisk shows King Jehu bowing down and giving tribute to the Assyrian king, and it is perhaps the only image of an Israelite or Judean king that we have.

So let's start with Jehu in 841 and move forward through the Israelite kings. Jehu reigned 28 years (2 Kings 10:36) and his son Jehoahaz reigned 17 years (2 Kings 13:10). That brings us to 798 BC, which is when Jehoash (the grandson of Jehu) began to reign.

Starting with Jehoash, we have eight kings of Israel remaining until the Assyrian invasion in 723/722 BC, which is another fixed date in Jewish history. Here are the lengths of their reigns:

- Jehoash reigned 16 years (2 Kings 13:10)
- Jeroboam II reigned 41 years (2 Kings 14:23)
- Zechariah reigned 6 months (2 Kings 15:8)
- Shallum reigned 1 month (2 Kings 15:13)
- Menahem reigned 10 years (2 Kings 15:17)
- Pekahiah reigned 2 years (2 Kings 15:23)
- Pekah reigned 20 years (2 Kings 15:27)

- Hoshea reigned 9 years (2 Kings 17:1)

So, let's start with Jehoash in 798, and then let's subtract the sum of the lengths of those 8 reigns (which is 99 years). When we do that, we move from 798 BC to 699 BC, and we immediately recognize that we have a big problem. Why? Because we know that Hoshea's reign ended when the Assyrians conquered Israel, and we know that happened in 723/722 BC. We have overshoot the end of Israel by 24 years!

How do we solve that problem? The first thing to look for is a co-regency, in which both a father and his son reigned as king for some period of time. Can we find that anywhere in our list? And the answer is yes.

In 2 Kings 14:11-14, we see that King Jehoash of Israel invaded Judah and broke down the wall in Jerusalem. This all happened in 792 BC. How do we know that? Because it the same year that Uzziah began to reign in the south after his father Amaziah was taken hostage by Jehoash (2 Kings 14:13).

It is very likely that Jeroboam was made co-regent with his father Jehoash shortly before Jehoash left Israel to invade Judah (just in case he never returned!). If so, then the 41 year reign of Jeroboam would began in 793 BC rather than at the death of Jehoash, and Jeroboam's 41 year reign would include an overlap of 12 years with his father Jehoash.

Remember our problem - we have overshoot the date of the Assyrian invasion by 24 years. But we have now explained half of that overshoot because we need to move the beginning of Jeroboam's 41 year reign back in time by 12 years.

That still leaves us with 12 extra years in our attempt to explain the entire 24 year overshoot.

Can we find another co-regency?

Typically we would expect a co-regency to involve a father and a son. Why? Because when someone becomes king who is not the son of the previous king, then what we typically find is that the death of the prior king and the installation of the next king happen on the same day!

So was there an overlap between Jeroboam and his son? We don't even need to look for that because Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, reigned for only 6 months! So there is no way we could explain a 12 year overshoot by looking to Zechariah's reign.

So how do we explain our remaining 12 year overshoot?

Well, let's look at where we are. So far we have made it to the end of Jeroboam II's reign in 753 BC. We also know the end of Hoshea's reign because that happened when the Assyrians invaded in 723/722 BC. And let's ignore Zechariah and Shallum for now because the combined lengths of their reigns was only 7 months.

Who is left? Menahem (10 years), Pekahiah (2 years), Pekah (20 years), and Hoshea (9 years). That means we have to somehow fit 41 years (10+2+20+9) into a period of about 30 years (from the end of Jeroboam's reign to the Assyrian invasion). So, again, we see our extra 12 years.

There is a big clue to the problem in that list I just gave you. It began with Menahem (10 years) and Pekahiah (2 years) - which is 12 years! That clue gives us the most likely solution to our problem.

What if Pekah (20 year reign) was reigning at the same time as Menahem and Pekahiah (combined 12 year reign)? If that were the case, then our problem would be solved by that second 12 year overlap.

Is there any evidence that Pekah's reign started, not at the end of Pekahiah's reign, but rather at the beginning of the reign of Menahem? And the answer is yes, and some of that evidence comes from the book of Hosea that we are now studying!

The first piece of evidence is the evidence we just looked at. We know that we have an extra 12 years, and we know where we need to look to explain it. And a co-regency of Pekah does explain it. There is no way to fit a 20 year reign of Pekah into the timeline unless there is an overlap of some sort.

The second piece of evidence comes from what we know about Pekah and Menahem. From 2 Kings 15:19, we know that Menahem was pro-Assyrian, and from 2 Kings 15:29 we know that Pekah was anti-Assyrian. That would explain why the northern kingdom split into two factions - one faction was in favor of closer ties with Assyria, while the other faction was not.

The third piece of evidence comes from this book of Hosea.

Hosea 5:5 - The pride of Israel testifies to his face; **Israel** and **Ephraim** shall stumble in his guilt; **Judah** also shall stumble with them.

Hosea 11:12 - **Ephraim** has surrounded me with lies, and the house of **Israel** with deceit, but **Judah** still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

How many kingdoms do we have here? Just two? Israel and Judah? No. We see three in these verses: Israel, Ephraim, and Judah. I think those verses are additional evidence that for this 12 year time period there were two northern kingdoms - Israel and Ephraim - one led by Menahem and Pekahiah, and the other led by Pekah.

Most likely, Pekah was based in Gilead, while Menahem and Pekahiah were based in Samaria.

2 Kings 15:25 - And Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty men of the people of **Gilead**, and struck him [Pekahiah the son of Menahem] down in **Samaria**, in the citadel of the king's house...

Finally, 2 Kings 15:17 tells us that Menahem began to reign in 39th year of Azariah (Uzziah), and 2 Kings 15:27 tells us that Pekah began to reign in the 52nd year of Azariah (Uzziah). If our view here is correct, then that beginning of Pekah's reign was the beginning of his sole reign, which lasted 8 years after his co-reign of 12 years.

Now where were we? We were trying to figure out the minimum length of Hosea's ministry if it lasted from the end of Jeroboam's reign to the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, and so far we have figured out half of the puzzle. We know that Jeroboam's reign ended in 753 BC.

So when did Hezekiah's reign begin? And with that question we have arrived at another of the most difficult issues regarding the kings of Judah and Israel!

If you look at the handout, you will see that, according to it, the 29 year reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:2) was from 715 to 686 BC.

And that makes perfect sense when we look at 2 Kings 18:13 and Isaiah 36:1. Why? Because both of those texts tell us that the Assyrian

king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah, and we know from extra-Biblical evidence that that attack occurred in 701 BC. If 701 BC is the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign, then 715 BC is the first year of his reign, which is the year shown on the handout.

Now, if Hezekiah's reign started in 715 BC, that means that Hezekiah did not begin to reign until **after** Assyria had invaded the northern kingdom in 723/722 BC. Does that make sense with the facts we see about Hezekiah's reign in the Bible? And the answer is yes, it does.

2 Chronicles 29:3 tells us that in the first year of Hezekiah's reign, he began to repair and cleanse the temple after his father Ahaz had defiled the temple. After doing this, King Hezekiah called everyone to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. We read about that in 2 Chronicles 30.

Now here is our question - whom did Hezekiah call? Just Judah, as we would expect if Israel still had its own king? No. Hezekiah, we are told in 2 Chronicles 30:1 called "all Israel and Judah." Verse 4 tells us they made "a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan."

What does that tell us? It tells us that there was no king or kingdom in Israel at this time, which means that it was after 723/722 BC (as shown on the handout for Hezekiah's reign). At the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, he was the only king of both north and south.

But I thought everyone in the north was carried off in 723/722 BC? How could there still be people in the north to receive this proclamation from Hezekiah? The answer is that not everyone was carried off by the Assyrians. We see that in verse 6 of 2 Chronicles 30.

2 Chronicles 30:6 - So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again **to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.**

Well, that all sounds pretty simple. Where is the big difficulty? It is in three verses, which together constitute one of the biggest puzzles in Old Testament chronology:

2 Kings 18:1 - In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

2 Kings 18:9-10 - In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it, and at the end of three years he took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken.

Those verses tell us that the reign of Hezekiah and the reign on Hoshea overlapped. That would mean that Hezekiah was reigning before and at the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel.

But how can that be? We know the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign was in 701, which means that the beginning of Hezekiah's reign was in 715 BC. And we know that he reigned for 29 years (2 Kings 18:2). And, although we have not gone through all the subsequent kings of Judah, they all fit together perfectly when Hezekiah's 29 year starts in 715 and ends in 686. You can see them all listed on the handout for Lesson 1, along with the years of their reigns up to the Babylonian deportation of 586 BC.

So how then do we explain 2 Kings 18:1, 9, and 10? We have three options, none of which is entirely appealing.

OPTION 1: We can throw up our hands in defeat and await further investigation or further information, perhaps from archaeology.

OPTION 2: We can determine that the brief linkages to the reign of Hoshea in those three verses (which, by the way, are not found in the parallel passages from 2 Chronicles) were added later by some scribe and were not part of the original inspired text.

OPTION 3: We can determine that Hezekiah must have had a period of co-regency with his father Ahaz that is not otherwise described in the Bible and that is not counted as part of his official 29 year reign.

As I said, none of those options makes us do a victory dance! They all have problems.

Although many commentators take the first “throw up our hands” approach, I don’t like that approach at all. If we throw up our hands whenever we reach a hard part of the Bible, that rightly does not leave the world with much confidence about what we have to say about the other parts of the Bible.

But does any of this really matter? Why not just skip over it? The answer is that it matters.

First, it matters because it is the word of God. And maybe we don’t need a second reason when that is the first reason.

But second, it matters because those who argue against the inerrancy of the Bible often start right here, and we need to know how to respond.

And third, it matters because it will help us understand Hosea because it forms the backdrop of the book. Jeroboam, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Jehu are mentioned in the first chapter. Doesn’t that mean we need to know about Jeroboam, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Jehu?

So let’s move on to Option 2 - that the links to the reign of Hoshea in those three verses were later added by some scribe and were not part of the original inspired text. We might be tempted to dismiss that option out of hand, and perhaps we should, but let’s look at it for a moment.

First, we know that some minor additions were made to the inspired text over the years. How do we know that? Because we have the manuscripts that show the minor differences. And we can usually figure out which of the variant readings is most likely (and, in some cases, is certainly) the original version.

Yes, we can be confident that we have the inspired word of God in our modern translations, but we know that some minor changes occurred over the intervening thousands of years. Do those very minor changes have any impact on the message of the Bible. No, they do not. And there are remarkably few of them given the length of time and the number of copies involved. God has preserved his word by his providence, and nothing we say today has any impact on that wonderful truth!

So, yes, we know that a few minor changes have occurred over the millennia, but that is not the only reason we should pause and consider Option 2.

Second, and this is a big one, what would happen to our timeline if we did not recognize that Pekah was reigning alongside Menahem and Pekahiah?

Well, we know what would happen. What would happen is that the entire timeline of the northern kingdom would get moved ahead by 12 years. That would mean that Hoshea would begin to reign in 720 BC rather than in 732 BC. And that would mean that the nine year reign of Hoshea would end in 711 BC. But Hezekiah began to reign in 715, and so that would give us about a three year difference between the reign of Hezekiah and the reign of Hoshea, which is precisely the shift we see in the 2 Kings 18:1. If that is just a coincidence, it is a remarkable coincidence!

So what can we say from that? What we can say is that IF I were reading 2 Kings, and IF I did not know that Pekah's reign overlapped two other kings by 12 years, then I would naturally think that Hoshea's third year coincided with Hezekiah's first year. And if I were a scribe trying to making sense of it all, I might have jotted that down in the margin, causing some later copier to think it was part of the original text.

Is that what happened? I am the last one to ever argue that any word in our translations of the Bible came in after the fact, but here I think we can see how it might have happened.

And, again, if Hoshea and Hezekiah really reigned at the same time, then how would we explain the account in 2 Chronicles 30 where Hezekiah in his first year sends a proclamation to "the remnant of you [in the north] who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria"?

If we reject that second option, what is left? What is left is the conclusion that Hezekiah did begin to reign during the reign of Hoshea, but Hezekiah reigned alongside his father Ahaz, and the 29 year length of his reign given in 2 Kings 18:2 includes only his reign after the death of Ahaz. That is possible, and perhaps that is where we should end up.

Why does it matter? It matters because we know from verse 1 that Hosea's ministry extended up until Hezekiah. And so where we put the beginning of Hezekiah's reign tells us how long Hosea's ministry was and whether Hosea's ministry included the fall of the north.

If the reference to Hezekiah in the first verse of Hosea refers to his 29 year reign that began in 715, then it means that Hosea saw the fall of the north that occurred in 723/722 BC. And it also means that the **minimum** length of Hosea's ministry is the time from the end of Jeroboam's reign in 753 up until the beginning of Hezekiah's reign in 715, which is 38 years.

But if the reference to Hezekiah in the first verse of Hosea refers to some prior co-regency of Hezekiah with Ahaz that started in the third year of Hoshea, then it means that Hosea may not have seen the fall of the north. And it also means that the **minimum** length of Hosea's ministry is the time from the end of Jeroboam's reign in 753 up until the third year of Hoshea's reign in 729, which is only 24 years.

We will proceed under the well-attested view that Hezekiah's 29 year reign started in 715 BC. As for whether he also reigned as co-regent prior to that date, let's leave that as an open question for now and see what the text has to tell us.

Lesson 3

When we ended last week, we were looking, not at Hosea *the Book*, but rather at Hosea *the man*. As we saw, we don't know too much about Hosea beyond the names of some of his relatives. But we were able to discern from the text that he was likely a young man when he began to prophesy.

To wrap up our discussion of the Lesson 2 Handout from last week, let's look at one final "problem verse" before we move on:

2 Kings 17:1 - In the **twelfth** year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years.

If we refer to our handout from Lesson 2, we can see that it disagrees with this verse. According to our handout, Hoshea began to reign just a few years after Ahaz began to reign, not 12 years after Ahaz as we just read in 2 Kings 17:1.

Now, if the only problem was that 2 Kings 17:1 disagreed with our handout, then our solution would be immediate! But 2 Kings 17:1 also seems to disagree with other verses in 2 Kings, and that is why 2 Kings 17:1 is listed in the problem category!

2 Kings 15:30 - Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

2 Kings 16:1 - In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign.

Those two verses tell us two things: First, that Ahaz began to reign in the 17th year of Pekah, and second, that the first year of Hoshea is the same as the final (which was the 20th) year of Pekah. What that

means is that the first year of Hoshea (in the 20th year of Pekah) was the **third** year of Ahaz's reign (the 20th year of Pekah being three years after the start of Ahaz's reign in the 17th year of Pekah). And that is what our handout shows.

But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea began to reign in the **12th year** of Ahaz rather than the **third year** of Ahaz (as we deduced from 2 Kings 15:30 and 2 Kings 16:1). How do we explain that difference between 2 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 15-16?

One possible explanation is that, as we have discussed in other contexts, Hebrew numbers are notoriously difficult to copy. Vertical strokes are used for units, horizontal strokes are used for tens, and single strokes could easily be overlooked or miscopied. So, perhaps the number 12 in 2 Kings 17:1 was originally the number 2 or the number 3, and at some point it was miscopied.

Another possible explanation is that, once again, we have a co-regency - this time between Ahaz and his father, Jotham. This solution may be indicated by an oddity in the text about Hoshea. The verse we are looking at (2 Kings 17:1) says that Hoshea began to reign in 12th year of **Ahaz**, but that is not the only Judaeon time reference we are given for Hoshea. We also have 2 Kings 15:30.

2 Kings 15:30 - Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, **in the twentieth year of Jotham** the son of Uzziah.

Why are we given two Judaeon time references for Hoshea's reign - one to Jotham and one to Ahaz? Perhaps because they were both reigning at the same time.

And, in fact, we know for sure that they were both reigning for some overlapping period of time. How do we know that? Because of the verse we just read - 2 Kings 15:30.

That verse mentions the **20th year** of Jotham, which is odd. Why is that odd? Because 2 Kings 15:33 tells us that Jotham reigned only **16 years**. What that means is that for at least 4 years, Ahaz was running things while Jotham was still alive. Perhaps 2 Kings 17:1 tells us that this co-regency of Ahaz with his father Jotham started even earlier. (The handout for Lesson 2 shows the 4 year overlap, but does not show the possibly longer overlap.)

And there is another piece of evidence favoring a 10 year co-regency before the official reign of Ahaz began. 2 Kings 16:2 says that Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign. And, 2 Kings 18:2 says that his son, Hezekiah, was 25 years old when he began to reign. If the only reign of Ahaz was his 16 year official reign, then Ahaz was 36 when his son was 25 - which means that Ahaz was a father at age 11. But if we include a 10 year co-regency, then Ahaz became a father at age 21 rather than age 11.

For this problem verse, I favor the explanation of a longer co-regency, but it is also possible that there was a miscopied number in 2 Kings 17:1.

And with that we end our dive into the deep end of the pool when it comes to the chronology of the kings! Again, there are additional resources available on the website if anyone wants to continue swimming in that pool!

North or South?

Moving on, here is our next question about Hosea, and it is a question that we often ask here in Texas: was Hosea a northerner or a southerner?

While Hosea had a message for both the northern and southern kingdoms, he directed his strongest and most urgent words to the people of Israel in the north.

When Hosea talks about Judah in the south, Hosea's words reflect an optimism that they may be able to avoid what would soon happen to those in the north. That optimism may have been caused by the religious reforms of King Hezekiah in the south that we looked at last week.

Hosea's focus on the north might mean that he was likely from the north himself, perhaps taking refuge in the south at some point when the Assyrians arrived. But Amos was also focused on the north - and Amos was from the south. So we need better evidence to conclude that Hosea was from the north.

That better evidence comes from Hosea's expertise about what was going on in the north. Hosea speaks as an eye witness.

Hosea 4:13 - They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good.

Hosea 13:2 - And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, “Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”

Hosea knows the conditions in the north, he knows the history of the north, he knows the traditions of the north, and he knows the geography of the north. And Hosea calls the King of Israel “our king” in Hosea 7:5.

Some have surmised from his frequent references to Moses and Deuteronomy that Hosea was a Levite who lived in the north.

One thing we know for sure about Hosea is that he was faithful and obedient to God whatever the cost. And in Hosea’s case, that cost was deep personal sacrifice and bitter sorrow.

As always, God chose exactly the right person through which to breathe his word. As one commentary described it:

Nothing less than the combination of Hosea’s background steeped in covenant truth, of the tragic marital experience which put him in touch with God’s own heart, and of his recognition that God not Baal was the source of all power and love, could have produced this book which by its story and oracles transposed Israel’s knowledge of God into the real intimacy of a true marriage.

And another:

Molded by this crucible of domestic tragedy, Hosea was particularly equipped to give his listeners a glimpse of the pain that God felt when Israel rejected His love and went “a whoring” after other gods. Israel was a harlot in every sphere of life: religiously, in seeking after other gods; socially, in creating a society of adulterers; and politically, in searching for the protection of foreign nations rather than Almighty God.

God wanted Hosea to know how he felt, and so God put Hosea into a situation that would cause Hosea to know how God felt. And so when we hear the message of Hosea, we are hearing the inspired word of God proclaimed from someone who knew how God felt. How? Because Hosea felt the same way.

We will learn much more about Hosea the man as we move verse by verse through Hosea the book.

What are the key themes in Hosea?

The best way to identify the themes of a book is to study the book, and that is what we will do as we work through each verse of Hosea. As we do that, we will be on the lookout for themes that we have already identified as well as new themes that we may not have spotted yet.

Below are 10 key themes that I think we will see in Hosea.

Why so many themes? First, some of these themes are more prominent in the book than others. Second, although Hosea is a minor prophet, his prophesy is one of the longer books from the minor prophets. And third, Hosea jumps around a lot!

Theme #1: The Love of God

This theme, of course, is a theme of the entire Bible, but we see God's love on display in the book of Hosea in a way that is (perhaps) very different from how we are shown God's love in other books. If we ever wonder how God could love us so much that, while we rebellious sinners, God sent his only son to die for us, then we can turn back to the book of Hosea for an answer.

And we can look at the strange marriage between Hosea and Gomer. As we know, in the New Testament, Christ's love for the church is described as a marriage.

Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle

or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

But that is not only a New Testament concept. That is what Hosea tells us. We see that same description of God's love here in Hosea. God loves his people in Hosea as a husband loves his wife - as Christ loves his church.

And here is a question I want us to ask ourselves as we study this book of Hosea: we know that God loves his people, **but did Hosea love Gomer?** Or did Hosea spend each day of his marriage wishing he had married someone else? Was Hosea ever glad he had married Gomer? Let's keep that question in mind as we study this book.

So, our first theme is the love of God.

Theme #2: Spiritual Adultery

This second theme is related to the first - the marriage between God and his people is not always a happy marriage. Instead, God's people reject God and turn instead to someone else - to false gods and to foreign alliances. They become guilty of spiritual adultery.

A primary way that this theme is shown to us in the book of Hosea is through the life of Hosea himself. God wanted Hosea to experience what God himself was experiencing. And so, Hosea married Gomer, the prostitute, who, perhaps not unexpectedly, seems to have soon turned back to her old way of life.

Hosea 3:1 - And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress..."

We will need to be on the lookout for this theme of spiritual adultery all throughout the book, both in the relation between God and his people, and also in the relation between Hosea and Gomer, which is intended to teach us about God's relation with his people.

Theme #3: The Grace of God

Why didn't God just forget about his people when they forgot about him? Why didn't Hosea forget about Gomer when she wandered off to her old life of sin? We could ask the same question about ourselves! And the answer would be the same: grace!

Ephesians 2:4-7 - But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Can we find a foretaste of that grace in the Old Testament? Yes, we can. And one place we can find it is right here in the book of Hosea.

Hosea 14:4-7 - I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

No one looking at the state of the people in Hosea's day would ever have expected a happy ending to this book, but the book of Hosea does have a happy ending. Why? Because of the grace of God.

Theme #4: Reconciliation

A central theme of the book of Hosea is that God wants his family back.

God's want his loving wife to return to him, and God wants his children to love him and obey him. In short, God wants a reconciliation, and again we see a theme here in Hosea that is also a theme of the entire Bible. In fact, in some ways, reconciliation is THE theme of the Bible!

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

A central theme of Hosea is reconciliation. That reconciliation is needed, and that reconciliation is possible.

Theme #5: The Children of God

The theme of God's people as God's bride is not the only way that God's people are described in Hosea. God's people are also described as God's children. And, in fact, that is the description we find in one of the most famous verses of the book.

Hosea 1:10 - Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

And, of course, we see this theme on display as well in the life of Hosea himself - Hosea has a wife, and Hosea has three children.

Why do we have both metaphors? Why are we shown God's people as a wife and also as children? Let's keep that question in mind as we work through the text. As we look for this theme, let's see if we can figure out why it is being used.

Theme #6: Repentance

The word "turn" or "return" or "repent" is used 22 times in Hosea in various ways, both to describe the turning of God's people and also to describe the turning of God to judgment or God turning away in his anger.

Hosea 11:5 - They shall not **return** to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to **return** to me.

Hosea 14:4 - I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has **turned** from them.

Yes, Hosea has a stern message for the people of God who have turned away from God to follow another. And yes, Hosea has a hopeful message for the people of God about the day to come when they would once again be called the children of God. But between the stern message and the hopeful message stands repentance, and that is a key theme of the book of Hosea.

Theme #7: Divine Sovereignty

Again, we see a key theme in Hosea that is also a key theme in the entire Bible - God reigns supreme over all.

We saw that theme in our study of Daniel, and, as we recall, it was a theme that the great Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way!

Daniel 4:32 - And you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

We see that theme in Hosea as well.

Hosea 8:4 - They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.

Hosea 13:11 - I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

The people thought they were in charge, making kings and princes as they wished. But those very same kings are described in Hosea as a judgment by God.

It has been rightly said that people generally get the leaders they deserve, and perhaps we have seen that in our own recent history, but we see it for sure here in Hosea and in the line of worthless kings who reigned over the northern kingdom during the days of Hosea.

“The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” That is a theme of the book of Hosea.

Theme #8: Prosperity leads to self-reliance

When Hosea began to preach during the days of Jeroboam, the people were at peace and were prospering. A theme of Hosea is that the people were misinterpreting their prosperity. They thought it came from Baal instead of from God!

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

And the tragic irony is that their great blessings from God became the reason for their apostasy.

Hosea 13:6 - But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

Paul would later teach about this same issue.

Philippians 4:12 - I know how to be brought low, and I know how to **abound**. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, **abundance** and need.

In Hosea's day, the people had not learned that secret of facing abundance! And we see that sad result.

As we study Hosea, we need to remember something that James 1:23 tells us about God's word - it is a mirror! As we look into the mirror of Hosea, we need to ask ourselves what we see. Do we also see a people who have yet to learn the secret of facing plenty?

That is a key theme in the book of Hosea.

Theme #9: We must learn from our history.

Hosea is full of references to Israel's history, from recent events all the way back to the patriarchs. In fact, as we will see in the first chapter, a driving factor in the book of Hosea is an event in the life of Jehu that happened 50 years earlier. But that is not all - we will also see references to Jacob, Abraham, and even Adam. (Hosea is the only prophet who mentions Adam!)

Why is this history important?

One reason is that this history highlights the horror of Israel's infidelity by showing how God has always been so good to Israel all throughout its history.

Another reason is that the history shows how often the people had been warned by God about the events that were very soon going to befall them. Another way to describe this theme is with the phrase "I told you so!"

And a third reason is that the history in Hosea gives the people hope that perhaps once again God will rescue them from the results of their own disobedience.

One commentator describes the theme this way:

Hosea's whole preaching is rooted in the saving history.
It might almost be said that he only feels safe when he
can base his arguments in history.

Another commentator suggests that central to Hosea's message is the outworking of the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy, and that central to understanding the message of Hosea is an understanding of the Sinai covenant.

In short, the book of Hosea is steeped in history from beginning to end. In fact, in the very first verse we find five kings!

The conclusion is obvious - we need to study that history to understand this book. And we need to heed that history ourselves if we are to learn the lessons that are here for us from our schoolmaster, the Old Testament! (Galatians 3:24)

Theme #10: The church of Christ

This theme may seem to some like an unexpected theme for the book of Hosea, but it should not be. In fact, this theme of the church of Christ is central to understanding the book of Hosea. Why?

Because for the people of Hosea's day there would not be a happy ending. Assyria was coming and would kill or carry off most of Hosea's listeners. And yet, the book of Hosea has a happy ending. How can we explain that? We can explain it in only one way - that promised happy ending in Hosea finds its fulfillment only in Christ and in the church of Christ.

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

And how is that theme shown in Hosea?

Hosea 1:10-11 - Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Hosea 2:18-20 - And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

I think we will find in this book of Hosea some of the most beautiful prophecies in the Bible about Christ and about the kingdom of Christ. Let's be on the lookout for them!

Those are 10 themes that I think we will see in Hosea, but let's be on the lookout for others as well!

Lesson 4

Who else was prophesying at the same time as Hosea?

The prophet Hosea overlaps with several other Old Testament prophets.

In fact, the first verse of **Isaiah** looks very similar to the first verse of Hosea.

Isaiah 1:1 - The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of **Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**, kings of Judah.

Amos also mentions two of the same kings that we see in Hosea 1:1.

Amos 1:1 - The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of **Uzziah** king of Judah and in the days of **Jeroboam** the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Micah also mentions kings that we find in Hosea 1:1.

Micah 1:1 - The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of **Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah**, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Those three prophets - Isaiah, Amos, and Micah - were prophesying at the same time as Hosea, but there are some significant differences between those prophets and Hosea.

First, Isaiah, Micah, and Amos were all from the south, unlike Hosea, who was from the north. In fact, Hosea appears to have been the only Old Testament prophet who was from the northern kingdom and whose message was directed to the northern kingdom. (Jonah, as we see in 2 Kings 14:25, was from the north, but his message was directed elsewhere.)

Second, Isaiah and Micah were sent to the southern kingdom, unlike Hosea, who was sent to the north. Amos, like Hosea, preached to the north, but, as we said, Amos, unlike Hosea, was from the south. Perhaps the people were more likely to listen to one of their own - and that was Hosea!

Third, as for Hosea and Amos, the two prophets in the north, their messages were different. Amos was focused on the social injustice that he saw all around him, while Hosea was focused on the spiritual infidelity that he saw all around him. Amos declared that the people were **unjust**, while Hosea declared that the people were **unfaithful**.

Finally, although they did not overlap in time, there is some similarity between Hosea and Jeremiah.

Jeremiah warned the people of the southern kingdom that they would soon go into captivity, and he lived to see it. Hosea likewise warned the northern kingdom that they would be going into Assyrian captivity, and he lived to see it.

Hosea has been called the “death-bed prophet of Israel” because he was the last to prophesy before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, and likewise Jeremiah was the last voice sent to Judah before its captivity.

We should mention two other prophets before we move on: Jonah and Nahum. Those two prophets were directed, not to Israel or to Judah, but rather to their oppressor - the Assyrian city of Nineveh, which was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire from 701 BC until its destruction in 612 BC by the Babylonians. And, as we said, Jonah, like Hosea, was from the north.

What is the structure of the book of Hosea?

With some books that question is easy, while with other books that question is hard. Hosea falls squarely in the second category. This is a hard question.

Here is how one commentary describes it:

The analysis of the structure of Hosea seems to be one of the great pitfalls of Old Testament study. It has produced little unity or consensus, and the various proposals have little in common besides noting that there is an apparent break between 3:5 and 4:1.

Some commentators come up with a structure and then try their best to fit the book of Hosea into that structure by removing verses and rearranging verses in the book at their whim. I like how one commentary describes such approaches - "fanciful arrogance." If the book of Hosea does not fit with our proposed structure, then we need to change our proposed structure rather than change the book of Hosea!

And many structures have been proposed. But rather than look at all of them, let's look at one proposed structure that, in my opinion, seems to work the best. The real test of whether it works will be whether it makes sense as we move through the book, but I think it is a good place to start.

Why do I like this particular proposal? **Because it closely ties the first three chapters of Hosea into the remainder of the book.** Yes, there is a clear break between chapter 3 and chapter 4, but perhaps that break is not quite as stark as some commentators seem to believe.

And wouldn't that make sense? Wouldn't we expect the opening chapters of the book to set the stage for the remaining chapters? Wouldn't we expect Hosea's marriage and his three children to be tied closely to the message of the entire book? Why did God command Hosea to marry in chapter 1 if God was planning to immediately change the subject in chapter 4? And if we would be asking that question, I'm sure Hosea would have really been asking that question!

I think we can make a comparison here with the book of Revelation. In that book, we find seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor in chapters 2 and 3, and then we find a vision beginning in chapter 4. Wouldn't we expect there to be a relation between the two, or do we think (as surprisingly many commentators appear to think) that the letters in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation have no relation to the vision that follows? If our view of Revelation 4-22 leaves us wondering why we have chapters 2 and 3, then our view of Revelation 4-22 is almost certainly wrong. Likewise, if our view of Hosea 4-14 leaves us wondering why we have Hosea 1-3, then our view of Hosea 4-14 is almost certainly wrong. It all sounds very simple - which makes it doubly surprising why so many commentaries take the opposite approach!

So what is the relation between Hosea 1-3 and Hosea 4-14? Let's start with three observations.

First, the first chapter of Hosea is dominated by Hosea's marriage and the births of three children, and these three children are given names that are symbols of Israel's future.

Second, Hosea describes his domestic life in **two parts**, with the first part in chapter 1 being in the **third** person (*e.g.*, "And the LORD said to **him**" in verse 3), and the second part in chapter 3 being in the **first** person (*e.g.*, "And the LORD said to **me**" in verse 1).

Third, the three opening chapters of Hosea portray Israel as an adulterous woman who must undergo exile and deprivation but who will eventually experience restoration.

When we turn to Hosea 4-14, what will we find? What we will find are these same three features that, in turn, are based on Hosea's three children! In fact, the number three occurs again and again in chapters 4-14.

- The first general accusation in Hosea 4 is threefold.
- Hosea then indicts three specific groups of people (religious leaders, common people, and women).
- The text then gives three extended warnings to Israel and Judah, followed by a threefold call to repent.
- In Hosea 5, the text addresses three groups: the priests, the house of Israel, and the house of the king.

- Signals then ring out at three places: Gibeah, Ramah, and Beth Aven.

And there are other examples we could give. Why do we see the number three so often in chapters 4-14? I think Hosea is pointing us back to the three children in chapters 1-3.

And why are there **three** children? We have already looked at one possible reason - there were **three** kingdoms!

As we saw earlier, for 12 years shortly after Hosea began to preach there were **two** kingdoms in the north - a pro-Assyrian kingdom under Menahem and Pekahiah, and an anti-Assyrian kingdom under Pekah. Combining those two northern kingdoms with Judah gives us **three** kingdoms, which is the same as the number of Hosea's children.

Likewise, we see a similarity between chapters 8-14 and chapters 1-3. In chapters 8-14, the text moves back and forth between **first** person (God speaking, as in 8:1 - "they have transgressed **my** covenant and rebelled against **my** law") and **third** person (Hosea speaking, as in 9:9 - "**he** will remember their iniquity; **he** will punish their sins").

A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that it echoes the pattern established in chapters 1-3 where the account of Hosea's marriage is given both in the **third** person (chapter 1, "And the LORD said to **him**") and in the **first** person (chapter 3, "And the LORD said to **me**").

And again, in chapters 8-14, we see the emphasis on the number **three**, beginning at the top level with three main sections.

- First, in chapters 8-10, the book confronts the false security and the false prosperity of Israel.
- Second, in chapters 11-13, we see that God has determined and Hosea has affirmed that Israel must be severely punished.
- Finally, in chapter 14, there is a call to repentance and grace.

So here then is a proposed structure for Hosea:

- First, a linkage is established between God and Hosea in the account of Hosea's marriage to Gomer, and the major themes of apostasy, judgment, and restoration are developed.

- Second, using the three children of Hosea, the book presents a series of accusations dominated by the number three, ending with a threefold call to repent.
- Third, in three series of proclamations, Hosea presents God as being torn over what to do with his people and finally determining that exile is the solution.
- Finally, there is a final, more optimistic, call to repent.

This structure is shown in more detail on the handout. The test of any proposed structure is whether (a) it makes sense from the text, and (b) whether it helps us to understand the text. Let's put this proposal to the test as we work through the book.

Hosea 1:1

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

On the surface, verse 1 seems very straightforward, but verse 1 is anything but straightforward! In fact, verse 1 raises some big questions for us.

First, if Hosea's prophecies are directed primarily at the **northern** kingdom, then why are four of the five kings listed in verse 1 kings of the **southern** kingdom?

Second, if Hosea is both from the north and speaking to the north, then why do we find **any** southern kings named in verse 1?

So our first two questions are: (1) why **four** southern kings?, and (2) why **any** southern kings?

Third, if Hosea lived to see Hezekiah (as verse 1 tells us), then that means Hosea not only saw the northern king, Jeroboam II (who is named in verse 1), but Hosea must also have seen the six northern kings who followed Jeroboam: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. Why aren't those six kings listed in verse 1? Why instead do we see only Jeroboam II from the list of northern kings?

So we are only one verse into the book of Hosea, and we already have three puzzling questions! And, I think that when we answer those questions we are going to see that Hosea hid a deep theological message in the first verse of the book!

Before we look at those questions and before we uncover the deep theological message lurking in verse 1, let's quickly remind ourselves who these kings are and what they did. And let's start with the four southern kings.

Uzziah

The first southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Uzziah.

The reign of Uzziah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:1 (where he is called Azariah) and 2 Chronicles 26:1.

2 Kings 15:3 tells us that Uzziah did what was **right** in the eyes of the Lord. But, as the next verse tells us, the high places were not taken away.

What are these "high places"? Well, as with many false religious practices, they started off with the best of intentions.

1 Kings 3:2 - The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

And, as with all departures from the word of God (even those with the best of intentions), this departure quickly moved further and further away from what was right.

1 Kings 11:6-8 - So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

1 Kings 12:31 - He [Jeroboam I] also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.

1 Kings 14:23 - For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree.

The exile of Judah occurred, in part, because of these high places.

Jeremiah 17:1-4 - The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, on the mountains in the open country. Your wealth and all your treasures I will give for spoil as the price of your high places for sin throughout all your territory. You shall loosen your hand from your heritage that I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.

So, although Uzziah did what was right, he failed to remove those high places. (Later we will meet a king who did remove them.)

Finally, we should note that Uzziah's reign did not end well.

2 Chronicles 26:16 - But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

Because of that sin, King Uzziah was afflicted with leprosy for the remainder of his life. This disease explains the significant overlap between the reign of Uzziah and the reign of his son, Jotham.

Jotham

The second southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Jotham.

The reign of Jotham is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:32 and 2 Chronicles 27:1.

2 Kings 15:34 tells us that Jotham did what **right** in the eyes of the Lord. But again, as the next verse tells us, the high places were not removed.

The most significant event in the reign of Jotham was his defeat of the Ammonites in 2 Chronicles 27. And, as a result, we are told:

2 Chronicles 27:6 - So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.

As we discussed last week, Jotham reigned only 16 years (2 Kings 15:33), but we are told of an event in his 20th year (2 Kings 15:30). What that means is that Ahaz took over prior to Jotham's death, and (based on 2 Kings 17:1) that co-regency may have been in place for a decade.

Ahaz

The third southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Ahaz.

The reign of Ahaz is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 16:1 and 2 Chronicles 28:1. We also find a description of Ahaz's reign in Isaiah 7.

Unlike his father and his grandfather, 2 Kings 16:2 tells us that Ahaz did **not** do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. And that is quite the understatement!

2 Kings 16:2-4 - And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. **He even burned his son as an offering**, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

So, yes, Hezekiah (the next king after Ahaz) had a brother, and yes, Hezekiah's brother was burned alive by their father Ahaz in his worship of a false god! And not only did Ahaz not remove the high places, but Ahaz sacrificed at every high place he could find!

It was during the reign of King Ahaz that King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel wanted Judah to join them as an ally in their fight against Assyria. And when Ahaz refused, Rezin and Pekah attacked Judah, with the goal of replacing Ahaz with a puppet king (not from the line of David!).

Isaiah then came to Ahaz and brought him an assurance of protection from God. God offered to provide Ahaz with any sign he wanted, but Ahaz refused. He did not want any sign from God. Instead, Ahaz turned to Assyria for help.

2 Kings 16:7 - So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."

Assyria destroyed the enemies of Ahaz, but Judah then became a vassal of Assyria.

And Assyria soon called upon its vassals to meet with it in Damascus. While he was there, Ahaz saw pagan altars and was so impressed with them that he brought them back with him to Judah. Soon the land of Judah was filled with the same idolatrous shrines he had seen in Damascus, all sanctioned by the king himself.

And because Ahaz chose Assyria over God, God tells Ahaz in Isaiah 8 that Assyria would soon overflow the land, coming not to help him, but to overcome him. Ahaz was a corrupt king of a corrupt people, and both would be brought to ruin.

Was there any hope? Would things ever get better? Isaiah answered that question with one of the most wonderful prophecies in the Bible.

Isaiah 9:6-7 - For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Isaiah saw a new king in Judah's future -- a very different king from the evil King Ahaz, the king they now had. In fact, this coming King would be different from every king who had ever ruled or ever would rule or ever could rule!

Hezekiah

The fourth southern king in Hosea 1:1 is Hezekiah.

The reign of Hezekiah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 18:1 and 2 Chronicles 29:1. We also find a description of Hezekiah's reign in Isaiah 36-39.

2 Kings 18:3 tells us that Hezekiah did what **right** in the eyes of the Lord. And, unlike Uzziah and Jotham (who also did what was right), the next verse tells us that Hezekiah removed the high places!

Hezekiah was the exact opposite of his father, Ahaz. And I sometimes wonder if that fact about Hezekiah had something to do with the death of Hezekiah's brother, who was burned alive to a false Canaanite god by his father, Ahaz.

Hezekiah had witnessed Ahaz's evil first hand, and Hezekiah tried to undo the great damage that had been done by his father. How did he do that?

First, as we said, unlike even the good kings who had preceded him, Hezekiah removed the high places.

2 Kings 18:4 - He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

That reference to the bronze serpent in a very intriguing detail! The creation of that serpent in Numbers 21 had occurred seven centuries earlier, and it had been created for a good reason - but the people had hung onto it for centuries and had turned it into an idol. There's a sermon there for another day!

The second thing that Hezekiah did to undo the damage done by Ahaz was that he cleansed the temple and restored proper worship in the temple.

2 Chronicles 29:3-6 - In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east

and said to them, “Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD and turned their backs.

And Hezekiah called the entire land, both those in the south and those who remained in the north, to come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 30:5 - So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed.

Lesson 5

Hosea 1:1 (Continued)

Last week we began looking at verse 1, and we started by looking at the four southern kings mentioned in verse 1: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. As we saw, three of those kings did what was right, but one of them, King Ahaz, was evil. When we ended, we were looking at some things that King Hezekiah did to undo the damage that had been done by his father, King Ahaz. The first thing Hezekiah did was that he removed the high places, and the second thing he did was that he restored and cleansed the temple.

The third thing that King Hezekiah did to undo the damage done by Ahaz was that Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria.

2 Kings 18:7 - And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.

And, as a result, the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign.

2 Kings 18:13 - In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.

And, as he had done with Ahaz, the prophet Isaiah came to deliver God's word to Hezekiah. But, unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah listened to that word, and Hezekiah prayed to God for deliverance.

2 Kings 19:19 - So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.

And, as a result, one of the most amazing things, not just in the Bible, but in all recorded history, happened.

2 Kings 19:35-36 - And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.

God did not allow Assyria to do to Judah what Assyria had done to Israel.

After these things, God told Hezekiah that he was about to die.

2 Kings 20:1 - In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'"

But once again Hezekiah prayed, and once again God answered that prayer.

2 Kings 20:5-6 - Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life.

And, as a sign to Hezekiah, God did something that is also one of the most amazing things, not just in the Bible, but in all recorded history! God turned back the sun!

2 Kings 20:11 - And Isaiah the prophet called to the LORD, and he brought the shadow back ten steps, by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz.

But, as with his great grandfather Uzziah, Hezekiah's reign did not end on a high note.

In 2 Kings 20, Hezekiah gave a guided tour of his treasury to envoys from Babylon, who apparently took very good notes! And when Isaiah told Hezekiah how foolish he had been, but that the results of his foolishness would not be seen until long after his death, Hezekiah gave us one of the greatest demonstrations ever of a true politician!

2 Kings 20:19 - Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

Who cares if I have brought ruin to my country as long as it doesn't happen while I'm around!

And so that is a short description of the four southern kings named in Hosea 1:1.

Let's look next at both the one northern king who is named in verse 1 (Jeroboam II) and also at the six northern kings who followed Jeroboam but who (for some reason that we will look for later) are not named in verse 1.

Jeroboam II

Jeroboam II is the only northern king named in Hosea 1:1

The reign of Jeroboam II is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 14:23.

If Hosea began to preach during the reigns of Jeroboam in the north and Uzziah in the south and if Hosea was still preaching during the reign of Hezekiah, then Hosea most likely began to preach around 760 BC.

Jeroboam II reigned 41 years, and the year 760 was the 33rd year of his reign. What that means is that Jeroboam had already been on the throne for over three decades before Hosea married Gomer and began to preach.

What were things like in Israel in 760 BC? The short answer is that everything looked good, but it was all just about to fall apart. The people were enjoying and had been enjoying a time of great political stability and economic prosperity, but that was all about to change.

At this time, Assyria had an alliance with Israel that dated back to King Jehu and King Joash. We earlier saw evidence of that alliance when we looked at the famous Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, which is shown on the handout for Lesson 2.

And so Assyria at this time was **not** pushing westward **into Israel**. But Assyria was pushing westward **into Syria**, which for a short time took **two** enemies off of Israel's plate - both Assyria and Syria.

Assyria's invasion of Syria explains why there was at this time a lull in the wars between Israel and Syria. It was this strange political situation that provided both Israel and Judah (and especially Israel) an unusual period of peace, prosperity, and stability.

Early in his rule, Jeroboam II, king of Israel, had recovered the territories east of the Jordan, had extended the northern border to Lebo-hamath, and had enlarged the southern border all the way to the Dead Sea.

We usually think of Judah as having the upper hand in the relation with Israel, but that was not the case at this time. Judah had been a vassal state of Israel ever since king Amaziah's failed campaign against Jehoash in 2 Kings 14, and so Judah was at this time paying a yearly tribute to Israel.

The greatly enlarged extent of the northern kingdom coupled with the territory of the southern kingdom of Judah rivaled the golden age of the united kingdom of David and Solomon, which caused this period to become known as the silver age of Israelite history. During this period, Israel enjoyed material power, economic prosperity, and territorial expansion. And, as a result, the nation felt secure of their future.

The nation of Israel had all the signs that it believed were pointing to God's unlimited favor, and the future appeared to hold limitless possibilities. God's protection was assumed to be unconditional, and so the nation felt certain of its future.

And how were the people living during this "silver age" of peace and economic prosperity? Another prophet, Amos, answers that question. In short, a two-class system had developed in which the lower class suffered oppression and poverty while the upper class enjoyed power and excess.

But the so-called silver age was about to come to a swift end with the death of Jeroboam in 753 BC. In fact, Israel quickly went from a period of stability to a period of near anarchy. As we will soon see, almost every king of Israel after Jeroboam died by assassination at the hands of his successor.

And as Israel became weaker, Assyria became stronger under Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) and his successors Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC) and Sargon II (722–705 BC).

It is important for us to note that this period of prosperity had been a gift from God to his people in the northern kingdom.

2 Kings 14:26-27 - For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

Israel's **first** king had been Jeroboam I. Perhaps the people could start over with Jeroboam II and do what is right rather than what is evil.

But how did the people respond to that gift from God? With gratitude? Did they repent and turn back to God? No, they did not. And let's keep that in mind when we later circle back to the question of why Jeroboam is the only northern king mentioned in verse 1.

But before we do that, let's look at the six northern kings who followed Jeroboam. These six kings are not named in verse 1 - and they are certainly conspicuous by their absence!

Zechariah

Jeroboam II was succeeded by his son Zechariah (753 BC).

The reign of Zechariah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:8, but if you blink you will miss it! His reign ends only two verses later!

After reigning six months, Zechariah was struck down and killed by Shallum, the next king.

We need to pause here and note something very important about the death of Zechariah. His death ended the dynasty of Jehu, which had begun when Jehu killed both the king of the north and the king of the south in 841 BC.

Jehu's dynasty included four kings after him: Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah. But with the death of Zechariah that dynasty came to end as Shallum, who was not a descendent of Jehu, came to the throne.

God had earlier promised Jehu four of his generations would reign after him.

2 Kings 10:30 - And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”

And that promise was fulfilled with the reign of King Zechariah, the great great grandson of King Jehu. But there was not a fifth generation, and the promised fourth generation reigned for only six months.

Why is this history of Jehu’s dynasty so important? It is important because of a verse in chapter 1 that we will get to soon.

Hosea 1:4 - And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”

We will have some big questions to consider when we get to that verse!

Shallum

The reign of Shallum is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:10.

As we said, Shallum assassinated Zechariah and then took the throne of Israel for himself. And Shallum reigned for all of one month before he, too, was assassinated!

2 Kings 15:14 - Then Menahem the son of Gadi came up from Tirzah and came to Samaria, and he struck down Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and put him to death and reigned in his place.

Menahem

The reign of Menahem is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:17, and we are told that he reigned for 10 years.

As we discussed at length in Lesson 2, the most likely explanation for the chronological difficulties involving Pekah is that Pekah began to reign at the same time as Menahem, with Pekah leading an anti-Assyrian faction and Menahem leading a pro-Assyrian faction.

We should keep in mind something here. Jeroboam II had reigned for 41 years, and he had died within the past year. And now, very soon after his death, we have already had four more kings, two assassinations, and a civil war! If we include Jeroboam himself, then the people had five kings within about a year's time!

The people have, within a very short time, gone from a time of extreme stability to a time of extreme instability. Just think what things would be like in our own country if we had five presidents within a single year!

And remember that the stability under Jeroboam II had been a gift from God. What can we say about the instability under Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, and Pekah? As we said before, God very often gives a nation the leaders that they deserve!

As for Menahem, his most noteworthy act was to send a thousand talents of silver to the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser III (who is called Pul in the Bible) in return for Assyria's support for his claim to the throne (2 Kings 15:17–22). The upper left corner of today's handout shows extra-Biblical evidence of this tribute and shows the close ties between Menahem and Assyria.

You may have noticed that, unlike with the kings of Judah, we have not been pausing to note whether these kings of Israel did what was right in the eyes of God or did what was wrong. Why? Because they were all bad! Even Jeroboam II, whose long and stable reign had been a gift from God to the people, "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 14:24).

Pekahiah

The reign of Pekahiah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:23.

After the dynasty of Jehu came to an end with the death of Zechariah, the kingdom of Israel had only one more dynasty, if we can call it that. Pekahiah was the son of Menahem, but Pekahiah did not rule over the entire kingdom, but rather like his father he reigned over only the part of Israel not controlled by the rival king Pekah.

And Pekah proved to be a problem for Pekahiah in another way as well - Pekah assassinated him in 2 Kings 15:25 after Pekahiah had reigned for only two years.

Pekah

The reign of Pekah is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 15:27.

With the death of Pekahiah, Pekah found himself king of all Israel rather than just king of the anti-Assyrian faction that he had led for the past 12 years.

Unlike Menahem, Pekah was hostile to the Assyrian Empire. After Pekah seized power, he, along with Rezin of Syria, formed a coalition to resist the growing power of Assyria.

Jotham, King of Judah, refused to join their coalition, as did his son, Ahaz. (We looked at both of them last week.)

This refusal by Judah greatly worried Pekah and Rezin because it meant that they would have a hostile force on both sides - Judah on one side and Assyria on the other. And so they tried to replace King Ahaz with a puppet king, who was not of the line of King David.

Isaiah 7:6 - "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it."

And what did God have to say about that plan? We see it in the next verse.

Isaiah 7:7 - Thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass."

But, as we saw last week, Ahaz did not trust in God to deliver him. Instead, Ahaz of Judah appealed to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for aid, and the Assyrian king quickly overcame the coalition of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria.

Yes, there were a lot of moving pieces at this time! And both we and Israel have only one more king to look at!

Hoshea

The reign of Hoshea is described in the Bible beginning in 2 Kings 17:1.

After Pekah's plans were defeated by Assyria, Hoshea sensed weakness and, after assassinating Pekah, Hoshea took the crown for himself.

Hoshea saved Samaria from destruction by a hasty submission to Assyria, but he also carried on secret negotiations with Egypt for support against Assyria.

When that treachery was discovered, Assyria, now under Shalmaneser V, invaded Israel and took Hoshea captive. Samaria held out for about two years, but eventually Assyria crushed Israel and leveled its capital city of Samaria, which fell in 723 or 722 BC. Most of those left alive were exiled and scattered, never to return.

Hoshea, who reigned for nine years, was the last earthly king of Israel.

So, back to our three questions about verse 1:

First, if Hosea's prophecies are directed primarily at the **northern** kingdom, then why are four of the five kings listed in verse 1 kings of the **southern** kingdom?

Second, if Hosea is both from the **north** and speaking to the **north**, then why do we find **any** southern kings named in verse 1?

Third, if Hosea lived to see Hezekiah (as verse 1 tells us), then that means Hosea not only saw the northern king, Jeroboam II (named in verse 1), but he also must have seen the six northern kings that followed: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. Why aren't they listed in verse 1? Why do we see only Jeroboam II from the list of northern kings?

I think we are now in a position to easily answer all three of those questions!

First, why do we see **any** southern kings in verse 1?

This question is the easiest of the three.

First, while Hosea's message is directed primarily to the north, he also has a message for the south. And, unlike his message to the north, his message for the south is an optimistic message.

Yes, both north and south together will experience a restoration of some sort (to be discussed later), but their **immediate** future is

described differently. We can see this difference in the opening chapter.

Hosea 1:4 - I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.

Hosea 1:7 - But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God.

So, one reason we see southern kings in verse 1 is that Hosea has a message for them. And the optimism in that message may have had something to do with the fact that three of those four southern kings did what was right in the eyes of God.

A second reason we see southern kings in verse 1 is that Hosea may have been living in the south when he wrote this book. If, as verse 1 suggests, Hosea lived to see the fall of the north and the southern king who followed the fall of the north, then that means Hosea likely took refuge in the south when the Assyrians invaded the north.

So, a second reason we see southern kings in verse 1 is that Hosea may have been living under one of those southern kings toward the end of his life.

Let's move onto the next question: yes, we can see why southern kings are mentioned in verse 1, **but why so many?** Why do we see four southern kings in verse 1?

I think we can find the answer to that question in chapter 3.

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

That verse points out a crucial difference between the kings of the south and the kings of the north - the kings of the south were all from the line of King David.

If you look back at the handout from Lesson 1 you will see a list of the 20 northern kings and the 20 southern kings. Next to many of the northern kings you will find an asterisk indicating a king that began a new dynasty. We see many such kings in the north because many of the northern kings took their position, not by being the son of the previous king, but by murdering the previous king.

There are no asterisks in the south! Each king in the south, whether good or evil, came to throne through a family relation with the previous king. They were all of the line of King David.

And that fact was crucial for God to fulfill his unconditional promises to King David.

Psalm 89:35-36 - Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

Luke 1:31-33 - And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

So, why do we have four southern kings in verse 1? It is not because their individual names were all that important. Instead, what was crucial was their line! Hosea is showing us that all during the time that he was preaching, the line of King David was continuing in the south. We have Uzziah, then his son Jotham, his grandson Ahaz, and his great grandson Hezekiah - all tracing their ancestry back to King David.

Yes, Hosea will have some tough things to say the southern kings.

Hosea 5:10 - The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.

But, tough or not, and evil or not, those southern kings each occupied a crucial link in a chain reaching from David to Christ. And so we see all four of the overlapping southern kings in verse 1. There are no gaps in the southern kings listed in verse 1 - and that is the most important point about them.

And I think we will see that our answer to this second question helps us answer our third question: Why do we see only one northern king (Jeroboam II) in verse 1? Why don't we see the six kings who followed Jeroboam II?

Unlike the southern kings, those northern kings are not from the line of King David. They were all illegitimate rulers. Each of them, going all the way back to the first Jeroboam, who was an usurper. And we can see that fact by going all the way back to the first book in the Bible.

Genesis 49:10 - The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Just as priests came from the tribe of Levi, kings came from the tribe of Judah. (Yes, King Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, but that is a discussion for another day! King David was from the tribe of Judah, as were all of his descendants.)

The only reason to name any northern king in verse 1 is to provide a timeframe for the reader - and Hosea does just that when he mentions Jeroboam II. There was no need for him to name the illegitimate cutthroat assassins who followed Jeroboam.

But we should note something important here - while Hosea does not **name** those six kings who followed Jeroboam, Hosea does **describe** them.

Hosea 4:18 - Their rulers dearly love shame.

Hosea 7:3 - By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.

Hosea 7:5 - On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine.

Hosea 7:7 - All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.

Hosea 8:4 - They made kings, but not through me.

Hosea 8:10 - And the king and princes shall soon writhe because of the tribute.

So now we know why Hosea mentions **any** southern kings in verse 1, why he mentions **four** southern kings in verse 1, and why he mentions **only one** northern king in verse 1.

Lesson 6

Last week we answered our three questions about verse 1: Why are **four** of the five kings in verse 1 southern kings? Why are **any** of the five kings in verse 1 southern kings? And why aren't the six northern kings after Jeroboam named?

But when we started looking at verse 1, we also said that there was a deep theological message lurking in verse 1. What is that message?

We have already seen it. Despite the horrible end for Israel at the hands of Assyria that is proclaimed in this book, Hosea tells us repeatedly that there will be a happy ending for both Judah and Israel. In fact, we see that message in the opening chapter.

Hosea 1:11 - And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head.

We might see how Judah could have had a happy ending (although their judgment at the hands of Babylon was coming later), but how could there possibly be a happy ending for **Israel**, which was about to be carried off by Assyria, never to return? **The answer to that question is the central message of the book, and it is certainly the central message for us today.**

And what is that answer? We just saw a hint in Hosea 1:11 - "they shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves **one head**." And who is that one head? We have also see a hint to that question in Hosea.

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

So who is that one head from the line of David?

Acts 2:34-36 - For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Do you mean that all of that is lurking in that simple list of kings that we find in verse 1? Yes, that is exactly what I mean! There is no other explanation for how Israel could experience a happy ending - and we see a hint about that explanation starting with the very first verse!

Don't believe me? Well, where else in the Bible do we see the exact same list of four southern kings that we find here in verse 1 of Hosea?

Matthew 1:9 - ... and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ...

Those four kings were part of the line stretching from King David in Matthew 1:1 to Jesus in Matthew 1:16, and there is no way to explain the happy ending in Hosea apart from Christ and the kingdom of Christ. Israel has a happy ending in Hosea because Jesus rules today on the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Yes, we spent a lot of time on verse 1, but if we don't take the time to study the historical background of this book, then we will never understand it. Every person who originally heard Hosea knew the history that we just studied because they had lived or were living through it. We also need to know that history.

Hosea 1:2

2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”

On any list of strange verses in the Bible, Hosea 1:2 must be located somewhere near the top! And if **we** think verse 2 is strange, just think about how strange Hosea must have considered it! And yet Hosea obeyed it.

And perhaps we have an important lesson here about obedience. What is one of the most common arguments that we hear today from those who argue against the essentiality of baptism? Don't they often tell us that it just doesn't make sense? That they cannot see how my physical body getting wet can possibly have any bearing on the eternal destiny of my soul? How should we respond to that?

First, we can, of course, point them to Romans 6 where the Bible explains the relation between the two. But perhaps we can also point to the example of Hosea and others (such as Naaman) who obeyed God whether or not they understood the reason for the command or understood how obeying the command would accomplish anything. Hosea certainly knew what it meant to **trust and obey!** Do we? We can look to Hosea for an example.

Back to verse 2 - we need to spend some time on this verse. Why? Because there is quite a bit of dispute about what it means. Yes, verse 2 seems straightforward, but is it?

And let's keep in mind the importance of our answer to that question. Our view of verse 2 will color our view of the entire remainder of this book! Everything that we will hear from Hosea in this book is related to God's command to Hosea in verse 2. So it is very important that we properly understand verse 2.

To begin, let's list some of the different views that have been proposed about this verse.

View #1: God commanded Hosea to marry an immoral woman, and Hosea marries Gomer, who at the time of their marriage was already an immoral woman. Gomer gave him one son but soon returned to her old ways and bore two additional children, possibly of doubtful paternity.

View #2: Verse 2 and the events that follow are a parable or an allegory with no historical basis. At most, the whole story is a vision that has no relationship to Hosea's actual marriage or his actual family life.

View #3: Gomer was Hosea's real wife, but she was faithful to Hosea rather than unfaithful to him. What we read about Gomer in chapter 1 is just a metaphor of Israel's sin with no relation to Gomer's actual life.

View #4: Hosea neither did marry nor was commanded to marry an immoral woman. Instead, Gomer became unfaithful later in their married life, at which time Hosea realized that his now unhappy marriage with Gomer was intended to portray God's relationship to Israel.

View #5: Gomer was Hosea's wife, but her sin was not literal adultery against Hosea but rather was spiritual adultery against God because Gomer was an idol worshiper like the people to whom Hosea preached.

Before we start crossing some of those views off our list, let's ask a question: **why do we have so many different views?** After all, verse 2 looks pretty straightforward. Why do some see verse 2 as anything else?

The answer to that question is pretty easy to figure out when we consider the five options that we just listed. Four of those five options have something in common - **they are trying to save the text from itself!** That is, they can't believe that verse 2 actually means what it says, and so they come up with another meaning.

God could not have really commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute, they say, and so either it was all just a vision, or it was all just a parable, or she started out good and only later became immoral, or she started out good and stayed that way even while Hosea was creating an untrue story about her to make a point, or she was faithful to Hosea but unfaithful to God.

And what flaw do we see at once about each of those final four theories? **Not a single one of them can be found anywhere in the text.** And I would say that's a pretty big flaw!

So what about the first view - the view that the entire event is historical and occurred just as it is written? Is there any reason why we can't just adopt that view? Maybe. Some would point to Leviticus:

Leviticus 21:14 - A widow, or a divorced woman, or a woman who has been defiled, **or a prostitute**, these he shall not marry. But he shall take as his wife a virgin of his own people.

But that verse is directed to priests, and there is no evidence that Hosea was a priest. Some surmise that Hosea was a Levite, but even that does not mean he was a priest. And these rules in Leviticus 21 did not apply to ordinary citizens.

So what can we conclude about verse 2? I think we can conclude that verse 2 means exactly what it says. There is no need to save the text from itself. There is no reason why we should try to soften the command, and in fact there is every reason why we should not do so.

First, if we soften Hosea 1:2 to better fit our own views, then where does that end? What other verses will we edit and soften? If God didn't really mean what he said in Hosea 1:2, then where else did God not really mean what he said?

And think about Hosea's audience. What sort of impact would Hosea's preaching have had on them if they all knew that none of it was true! Wouldn't they have rightly rejected Hosea as one who was simply slandering his own wife? (Talk about a preacher story!)

And, more to the point, how would Hosea's marriage to Gomer have demonstrated God's marriage to Israel if none of what Hosea said about his own marriage was true?

And, yes, the command was very strange and very difficult, but as we said in the introduction, Hosea is not alone in receiving a very strange and very difficult command from God.

- Jeremiah was commanded not to marry at all (Jeremiah 16:2).
- Isaiah walked around naked and barefoot for three years (Isaiah 20:3-5).
- Ezekiel lay on his side for over a year near a small model of Jerusalem under siege while eating bread baked over human dung (Ezekiel 4:1-8).
- Ezekiel was also forbidden to mourn when his wife died (Ezekiel 24:15-18).

So now that we know that verse 2 means what it says, what does verse 2 say?

Let's read it again:

“When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.’”

That first phrase (“when the Lord first spoke through Hosea” in the ESV) is translated “the beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea” in the KJV. As the ESV suggests, the phrase most likely means that this command was God’s **first** revelation to Hosea. What that means is that this strange command was the very first thing that Hosea heard from God!

We aren’t told **how** God spoke to Hosea, but the source of the communication must have been unmistakable to Hosea because we do not see Hosea expressing any doubt here about whether God was really the one asking him to do this strange thing.

The important thing for us to note is that not only did God’s revelation to Hosea begin with this strange command in verse 2, but the book of Hosea also begins with this strange command in verse 2. What that suggests is that this command in verse 2 is the foundation of this book. We should not be surprised at all if everything that follows in Hosea is related somehow to this strange command in verse 2. And it also suggests that we should not water it down!

“Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom.” The word “wife” is important here. Hosea was to be bound to this immoral woman by a covenant relationship. Hosea and Gomer were husband and wife.

The next word we need to consider is the word “whoredom,” which is very hard to miss in verse 2 given that it appears three times in just that one verse! What does that word mean?

Was Gomer a prostitute? Or was Gomer just promiscuous?

There is a Hebrew word, “zona,” that means “prostitute,” but that word is not used here in verse 2. Does that mean Gomer was not a prostitute? Not necessarily.

The Hebrew word used in verse 2 is “zenunim,” which means “promiscuity” or “adultery.” And that word is a key word in Hosea. We see it, again, for example in Hosea 5.

Hosea 5:4 - For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
and they know not the LORD.

That God’s command uses the broader term “promiscuity” rather than the narrower term “prostitute” does not mean that Gomer was not a prostitute. She could have been both. The use of the broader term here may just mean that the focus here is more on her character than it is on her profession.

Also, and this is a point that will be useful for us to keep in mind throughout the entire book, we need to be careful not to read our own modern views into this text, and verse 2 is a good example of that danger.

Today, we may see a big difference between a woman who is a prostitute and a woman is promiscuous, but that has not always been the case. Here is how one commentary describes the issue:

The whole question of whether [Gomer] was a prostitute or simply sexually loose reflects more of modern social realities than ancient Israelite social realities. In our society of female independence a woman might be sexually loose but not receive payment for it. In ancient Israel this would have been the exception. An immoral woman would generally not have been married or have any other means of support, so she naturally would take payment for her sexual favors. Such women might not have worked in brothels, but if prostitution is defined as giving sex for payment, they certainly were prostitutes.

To someone living in Hosea’s day, verse 2 would likely have been enough for that person to conclude that Gomer was a prostitute. And we will see more evidence in the next chapter also suggesting that Gomer was, in fact, a prostitute.

But, even so, we should not think of Gomer as a call girl or a street-walker as we might think of someone called a “prostitute” today. Instead, we should think of Gomer more as an immoral woman who depended on “gifts” (in quotes) from men for her livelihood.

The most difficult question about verse 2 is what is meant by the phrase “children of whoredom.”

The phrase could mean “promiscuous children,” but I think we can likely rule that interpretation out immediately. Hosea never accuses his children of sexual immorality, and they are never presented to us as anything other than children.

A second view is that these children were the result of promiscuity, that is they were born out of wedlock. But, of course, an immediate problem with that view is that the children are all born after Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. But perhaps one or more of these children were not Hosea’s actual children, which could mean that the “children of whoredom” in verse 2 refers to those children that Gomer had with someone other than Hosea.

A third view is that Gomer already had children born out of wedlock when Hosea married her and that Hosea brought those children into his new family. There might be some support for this view in Hosea 2:1, where we will read about brothers and sisters. But that reference could be part of the metaphor that will be developed based on Hosea’s family - that is, the brothers and sisters could just refer to other Israelites.

A fourth view is that the phrase “children of whoredom” means children who bore the disgrace of their mother’s behavior. And this fourth view seems to be the best view. Why?

Because under this view all three of the children we are about to meet would be included whether or not some of them were actually Hosea’s children. (We know from the next verse that at least one of those three children was Hosea’s actual child.) That’s not to say that Gomer did not already have some children - perhaps she did - but it seems that the phrase in verse 2 would most naturally include the three children to whom we are about to be introduced.

The important point here is that Hosea’s goal is not to tell us all the details about his new family. Hosea’s goal is to show the similarity between God’s family and his own family. Just like Hosea’s own children, the people of Israel were children of whoredom - that is, they bore the stigma of their mother’s immorality.

Keep in mind a question that we asked earlier but did not answer earlier. Instead, we said that we would try to answer the question as

we worked through the text. And that question was this: why does Hosea use both the metaphor of his wife and the metaphor of his children to describe Israel? We aren't ready to answer that question yet, but we see the beginning of both metaphors here in verse 2.

Why was Hosea given this strange command? Verse 2 answers that question. It was because "the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."

That is why we are already talking about metaphors in only the second verse of the book. God specifically tells Hosea to enter into the same kind of marriage that he himself is in. God wants Hosea to experience the same sorrow that he has experienced.

The end of verse 2 may also have been a clue to Hosea that his marriage to Gomer would not always be a happy marriage. God had been forsaken by his wife, and so perhaps Hosea should have expected to be forsaken by Gomer.

One final question about verse 2. Why does verse 2 say that the "land" (rather than the "people") commits great whoredom?

That word "land" in verse 2 is the bridge between Hosea's marriage and God's marriage. It is the bridge between the **promiscuity** of **Hosea's** wife and the **apostasy** of **God's** wife.

Hosea's goal here is not to accuse the people of God of sexual immorality but rather to accuse them of spiritual apostasy. The word "land" drives this point home because it includes the culture, the institutions, the ethics, the idolatry, and everything else that was part of the Israelite culture that had forsaken God and was standing in opposition to God.

Hosea 1:3

3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim,
and she conceived and bore him a son.

The first thing we can say about verse 3 is that it does not show Gomer in a very flattering light, to say the least! The command to Hosea is to go and marry a promiscuous woman - "so he went and took Gomer!"

There were other ways Hosea could have responded to that command from God. He could have said, "I don't know any promiscuous women." Or perhaps, "I don't know any, but I'm willing to look for one." And there may have been more going on here than we are told, but for whatever reason it seems that Gomer came straight to Hosea's mind as soon as he heard the word "promiscuous."

All I can say is that Gomer must have had quite the reputation! The phrase "town tramp" comes to mind!

And why did Gomer agree to marry Hosea? Perhaps we can conclude that Hosea or his family had some wealth. Or perhaps Gomer had reached rock bottom and was happy to be given an opportunity for a new start. (But we need to hold off on considering that possibility until we get to Chapter 3.)

And what about Beeri? We met him two verses ago - Beeri was Hosea's father. And what about Hosea's mother? What did they think when their son married a prostitute? And what did they think when Hosea told them he did it because God told him to do it? I think we can safely say that there was a lot more Hosea could have said between verse 2 and verse 3.

I suspect that everyone who knew Hosea was shocked to their core about what Hosea did here. And wasn't that the point? Was it any less shocking that God would still be trying to talk Israel into coming back to him after all that the people had done? Was it any less shocking to find out that God was married to people who worshipped Baal and who sacrificed their children to their false gods?

What can we say about the names in verse 3? Gomer and Diblaim? What we can say is that Gomer was a real person who had a real father named Diblaim. Gomer was no vision. Gomer was no parable. Gomer was no allegory. Yes, God used Gomer as a metaphor, but Gomer was a real flesh-and-blood human being.

And Gomer's children were real as well. We meet the first child right here in verse 3: "she conceived and bore him a son."

We need to pay close attention to the three children we are about to meet. As one commentary describes them, "in a real sense, they are the prophecy, and everything else is just exposition." I think we may find that the entire book of Hosea is modeled around these three children.

Later we will have some cause to wonder about whether Gomer's children with Hosea were actually Hosea's children, but here the text is clear: "she conceived and bore **him** a son." Hosea's son in verse 3 was Hosea's actual son with Gomer. Hosea was married to Gomer, and that marriage was consummated. These are real people. This was a real marriage.

Hosea 1:4-5

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

God's commands to Hosea extend to the names he was to give his children, and God tells him to name his first born son Jezreel.

Jezreel does not seem to have been a common name. We find it used as a person's name in only one other place in the Bible (1 Chronicles 4:3).

But Jezreel was the name of a well known place in the days of Hosea. (We can see it on the map from the Lesson 3 in the northern part of Israel, and also on the handout for Lesson 6.)

Jezreel was both the name of a town and the name of a valley that were located between Galilee and Samaria. The town of Jezreel was northwest of Mount Gilboa in the valley of Jezreel. And this area of Jezreel was the scene of several significant and violent events in Israel's history.

- In Judges 6:33, Jezreel was where the Midianites and the Amalekites were encamped when Gideon defeated them with 300 men.
- In 1 Samuel 29:1, Jezreel was where King David was encamped when he was sent back by the Philistines while they were on their way to fight King Saul.

- In 2 Samuel 2:8-9, Jezreel was part of the kingdom of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, whom Abner wanted to be king in place of David.
- In 1 Kings 21:1, Jezreel was where Naboth had his vineyard until he was framed and murdered by Jezebel, wife of King Ahab.
- In 2 Kings 9:24-10:11, Jezreel was where Jehu killed King Joram, Jezebel, and the rest of Ahab's household.

In the mind of an Israelite, Jezreel signified bloodshed. Naming a child Jezreel in Hosea's day would have been similar to naming a child Gettysburg or Leipzig or Stalingrad in our own day.

In the long history of Jezreel, the one event that stands out for our purposes here is the event that involved Jehu. Why? Because God explains the reason for the name Jezreel in verse 4: "for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel."

Hosea was told to name his son Jezreel in around 760 BC because of something Jehu had done in 841 BC, which was 80 years earlier!

And, of course, we have many questions: To what event does "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4 refer, and why and how is the house of Jehu going to be punished for that event 80 years after the fact?

As for "the blood of Jezreel," we can read about what happened there in 2 Kings 9. In that chapter, the prophet Elisha told a young man to go to Ramoth-Gilead and anoint Jehu "king over Israel."

2 Kings 9:6-10 - So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory

of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.” Then he opened the door and fled.

So Jehu is proclaimed king, and he sets out to do what God had just commanded him to do: “strike down the house of Ahab your master.”

2 Kings 9:16 - Then Jehu mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to visit Joram.

In 2 Kings 9:24-26, Jehu shoots King Joram with an arrow (see the examples on the handout for Lesson 6), and his body is thrown out on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite.

In 2 Kings 9:27, King Ahaziah of Judah sees what happened to King Joram and starts to flee, but Jehu also shoots and kills him.

2 Kings 9:27 - When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, “Shoot him also.” And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

In 2 Kings 9:30-37, Jehu commands that Jezebel be thrown down and killed to fulfill the prophecy of Elisha that “in the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel.”

In 2 Kings 10:7, it was in Jezreel that Jehu received the heads of the 70 sons of King Ahab in baskets. And in verse 11, “Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men and his close friends and his priests, until he left him none remaining.”

Finally, in 2 Kings 10:18-27, Jehu tricked and killed all the priests of Baal and “demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

Lesson 7

Last week we met Hosea's first child, Jezreel, and when we ended we were looking at the phrase "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4. Let's reread verses 4 and 5.

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

What is the blood of Jezreel? As we saw last week, we have a lot to choose from!

- Jehu shot King Joram with an arrow, and Joram's body was thrown out on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth.
- King Ahaziah of Judah saw what happened to King Joram and started to flee, but Jehu also shot and killed him.
- Jehu commanded that Jezebel be thrown down and killed to fulfill the prophecy of Elisha that the dogs shall eat her flesh.
- Jehu then received the heads of the 70 sons of King Ahab in baskets, and Jehu struck down all who remained of the house of Ahab.
- Finally, Jehu tricked and killed all the priests of Baal and demolished the house of Baal, making it a latrine to this day.

And our question at the end of class was this: Was God upset by **all** of that bloodshed?

The answer to that question is easy. No, God was not upset by **all** of that bloodshed.

First, as we remember from 2 Kings 9:7, God had commanded Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab. And, second, immediately after

all the bloody events we just listed, here is what God said to King Jehu.

2 Kings 10:30 - And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.”

But perhaps that was not the question we should have asked - was God upset by **all** of that bloodshed? Perhaps we should have instead asked this question - was God upset by **any** of that bloodshed? Was God pleased with everything that Jehu had done, or just be some of the things that Jehu had done?

And perhaps that question has a different answer. Why? Because Jehu had been commanded to wipe out the house of King Ahab of Israel, but Jehu did more than that - Jehu also killed King Ahaziah of Judah (along with some of his relatives), and Jehu seemingly did so only as an afterthought.

2 Kings 9:27 - When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, “**Shoot him also.**” And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

And Jehu did not stop there.

2 Kings 10:13-14 - Jehu met the relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah, and he said, “Who are you?” And they answered, “We are the relatives of Ahaziah, and we came down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother.” He said, “Take them alive.” And they took them alive and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two persons, and he spared none of them.

And the death of King Ahaziah almost led to the destruction of King David’s royal line at the hands of Ahaziah’s mother.

2 Kings 11:1-3 - Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family. But Jehosheba, the daughter

of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus they hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not put to death. And he remained with her six years, hidden in the house of the LORD, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

So, yes, Jehu's actions at Jezreel almost led to the complete destruction of the line of King David, but, of course, we know that God could not have allowed that to happen, and it did not happen.

And although God had commanded Jehu to strike down the house of Ahab, there is no record that God ever commanded Jehu to do the same to the house of Ahaziah. And, as for Jehu himself, he turned out to be just as bad of a king as the other northern kings.

2 Kings 10:31 - But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin.

So, with all of that background in mind, let's go back to our questions: To what event does "the blood of Jezreel" in verse 4 refer, and why and how is the house of Jehu going to be punished for that event 80 years after the fact?

Let's start with the easiest question first - how is the house of Jehu to be punished? We have already seen the answer to that question.

Yes, four generations of Jehu's family followed him to the throne as had been promised by God in 2 Kings 10:30, but that fourth descendant, Zechariah, reigned only six months before he was killed by Shallum. That event was yet future when the prophecy of Hosea 1:4 was given, and that prophecy against the house of Jehu was fulfilled when the dynasty of Jehu came to an end with the death of Zechariah.

But **why** did that happen? Why was the house of Jehu **seemingly** being punished for something God had **commanded** Jehu to do and then had **commended** Jehu for having done?

I used the word "seemingly" because, although it may look on the surface that God is now punishing Jehu for doing something he was

commanded to do, I think we can immediately rule that out. It would not make any sense for God to punish Jehu for something that God had both commanded Jehu to do and had commended, and in fact had rewarded, Jehu for having done.

We should pause here to note that some commentaries disagree with that conclusion. They say that Jehu was in fact now being punished for something that had earlier been rewarded. Why? Because, they say:

“Hosea's pronouncement represents a major step forward in the evolution of Israel's understanding of God: the religious pogrom once commended by the prophets now stands condemned.”

But, of course, that doesn't make any sense at all. First, whether or not the people were evolving in their understanding, we know that God was not evolving. If God approved of some event that occurred in the days of Jehu, then we know that God still approved of that event in the days of Hosea.

And, we should note, Hosea himself is not shy at all when it comes to bloodshed:

Hosea 13:8 - I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

So, I think we can conclude that God is not punishing the house of Jehu for what Jehu had done to the house of Ahab. What is left? We have two options.

First, God may have been punishing the house of Jehu for what Jehu did, not to the house of Ahab, but to the house of Ahaziah. Perhaps Jehu went too far when he assassinated Ahaziah and 42 members of his family, so that the “blood of Jezreel” refers to the blood of Ahaziah.

But if God had a problem with the death of Ahaziah and the relatives of Ahaziah, then we might wonder why nothing was said about that issue when God in 2 Kings 10:30 commended Jehu for having “done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes.”

And we should note that Ahaziah, like Joram, was also an evil king.

2 Chronicles 22:2-4 - Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done. For after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing.

And so we could certainly see how Jehu could have been commended by God after having killed **both** Joram and Ahaziah, which is seemingly exactly what happened.

A second option is that God may have been punishing the house of Jehu for not learning the lesson that God had been teaching with the bloody events that occurred in Jezreel during the days of Jehu. And this view seems very likely to me. Why?

Because the commendation in 2 Kings 10:30 came at the **beginning** of the house of Jehu, while the punishment here in verse 4 was now coming near the **end** of the house of Jehu. So perhaps that timing tells us that the punishment had more to do with what the house of Jehu had done **after** the events at Jezreel rather than what Jehu had done at Jezreel.

And another reason I like this view is that it makes sense with the context. Hosea's message is not addressed to Jehu, who had died 50 years earlier. Hosea's message is addressed to the people who had been ruled by the dynasty of Jehu for 80 years.

Here is the key question: how were the people under Zechariah and the house of Jehu any different from the people under Joram and the house of Ahab (from the dynasty of Omri, Ahab's father)? The answer is not much!

Hosea's listeners, like their ancestors, had forsaken God for Baal. They had learned nothing from the blood of Jezreel, and so God would bring the house of Jehu to an end with that promised fourth generation.

But what does verse 5 mean?

“And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

Most likely the reference to breaking to bow of Israel refers to a military defeat of Israel. But which defeat?

It may refer to the defeat of Israel by Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III in response to Judah’s cries for help under King Ahaz. We talked about that defeat earlier when we looked at 2 Kings 16:7 and Isaiah 7. But that happened **after** the end of Jehu’s dynasty, which might be stretching the phrase “on that day” a bit too far.

A better answer may be that the defeat in verse 5 refers to death of Zechariah.

2 Kings 15:10 - Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down at Ibleam and put him to death and reigned in his place.

Notice that Shallum killed Zechariah at Ibleam. Where is Ibleam located? We have already seen an answer to that question! Let’s read again the verse that we looked at earlier about the death of King Ahaziah of Judah at the hands of Jehu.

2 Kings 9:27 - When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. And Jehu pursued him and said, “Shoot him also.” And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Gur, **which is by Ibleam**. And he fled to Megiddo and died there.

Ibleam was located in the valley of Jezreel, and Zechariah, the fourth generation of Jehu, died in the same valley where Jehu had killed Ahaziah, the king of Judah. (You can see Ibleam on the map shown on the handout for Lesson 6.)

This fact might provide some support for the view that the blood of Jezreel refers to the murder of Ahaziah. But wherever we land on that question, I think we would all agree that Zechariah’s death at Ibleam falls under the category of poetic justice! Jehu’s dynasty came to a bloody end in the same area where it had its bloody beginning!

Let’s look at two more things about the name “Jezreel” before we move on to look at the next child.

First, the Hebrew word “Jezreel” (in addition to being a place name) can mean “God will scatter” as one might scatter seed. That secondary meaning is, of course, very relevant to Israel, which would soon be scattered by Assyria.

Second, in Hebrew (as in English) the name “Jezreel” sounds very similar to the name “Israel.” That wordplay drives home the point that the child (Jezreel) is a sign for the nation (Israel). They are similar even to the point of their names sounding alike.

And if we are wondering whether this triple meaning was intentional, let’s hold off on that question for a while. Why? Because we may see some **quadruple** meanings before this book is over! Also, we may get see some evidence later in the book confirming that these additional meanings were, in fact, intentional. For now, let’s just keep the possibility in mind.

Hosea 1:6

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

In verse 6, we are introduced to Hosea and Gomer’s second child, a daughter.

And immediately we have a question. In verse 3, we read, “she conceived and bore **him** a son.” Here in verse 6, we read, “she conceived again and bore a daughter.” The key word “**him**” is missing in verse 6!

Can we conclude that this daughter was **not** Hosea’s daughter?

One commentary says not necessarily. It suggests that Hosea may have just omitted the obvious with the description of his second child. (And, looking ahead, we see that same omission in verse 8 with Gomer’s third child.)

While that explanation might make sense with a normal, happily married couple (where it would be readily assumed that all of their children were born in wedlock), that is hardly the situation here!

Gomer was selected specifically because she was immoral, which immediately raises the question of paternity for each of her children. With the first child, we are told that Hosea is the father. With the second and third children, we are not told that Hosea is the father.

Was Hosea the father of his final two children? We don't know for sure, but we have seen and will see some reasons to think that they were not.

But, again, that is not the question we should be asking - whether **we** think the children are legitimate. The real question is this: did **Hosea** think the children were legitimate? And I suspect the answer for him is the same as the answer for us - he didn't know for sure, and there were some reasons for him to think that they were not. And what about the children? Did they wonder who their father was?

The text is ambiguous as to the paternity of those final two children, and I think that ambiguity is deliberate. God, of course, knew the answer to that question, but God did not want us to know. I think God wanted both us and Hosea to wonder about the answer to that question - at least at this point in the text. Maybe we will see some conclusive evidence on this question as we progress through the book.

And maybe we don't have to wait very long for that evidence. What do we read next? "And the LORD said to him, 'Call her name No Mercy.'"

What does that name mean? The translation I just read was from the ESV. If we turn to the KJV or the ASV, we find the name Lo-Ruhamah, which is just a transliteration of the Hebrew words translated "no mercy" in the ESV. Other translations have "No Pity" or "No Compassion" as her name.

None of those translations seems to capture the meaning that I think we are intended to see here with this name. Why? Because we are not talking about a lack of mercy or pity or compassion that someone might have for an acquaintance or even for a stranger. This lack of mercy or compassion or pity is describing the feeling of a father to his daughter!

As one commentary describes it: her name "communicates rejection by her father and says that he has abandoned her to all the troubles of the world."

And how do we think that little girl would have seen her own name? I think she would have seen her name the same way that we are intended to see it: Not **Loved**.

And that interpretation of “not loved” does not violate the definition of the underlying Hebrew word. Here is how the underlying Hebrew word is defined in one lexicon:

“to fondle; by implication, to love, especially to have compassion on or upon, to love, to find, have, obtain, or show mercy on or upon, to have pity.”

Why then do all of those translations either opt for no translation at all or translate the name as “no mercy”? Perhaps because they are trying to soften the blow! Perhaps because it is unthinkable that someone would name his daughter “not loved”! But isn’t that the point? Wasn’t her name intended to be shocking? Intended to be unthinkable?

And as tempted as we might be today to soften the blow, do we think this little girl softened the blow when she thought about her own name? Do we think the other children in the village softened the blow? I think we should see her name as harshly as we can because I think that is what was intended, and I think that is how she and everyone else likely viewed her strange name.

One more reason I think we are on the right track with the translation “not loved” is because of how we see the same word used in the Psalms.

Psalm 103:13 - As a father shows **compassion** to his children, so the LORD shows **compassion** to those who fear him.

That word translated “compassion” in Psalm 103:13 is the same word we find here in Hosea 1:6 - and it the same thing that Hosea was announcing to the world that he did not have for his daughter!

Psalm 103:13 assumes that **all** fathers have this feeling for **all** of their children, but not Hosea, at least according to Hosea 1:6.

So did God not love his people? Is that the message we are intended to understand with this name? Yes and no.

Of course, God loved these people in the sense of God loving all people - the sense of God loving the world in John 3:16. **But did God love these people as a father loves his children?** Look at Psalm 103:13 again.

Psalm 103:13 - As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion **to those who fear him.**

So the Lord shows compassion to everyone? No. So the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. This compassion is not something that God has for everyone.

And again, that is why I think “Not Loved” is a better translation for the name of this little girl. Why? Because it is suggesting a break in that special paternal bond that a parent has for a child.

Now, earlier I said that Hosea did not have this love for his daughter, **at least according to Hosea 1:6.** Why did I emphasize that last phrase?

Because we should not assume that the name Hosea was commanded to give his daughter was ever an indication of how Hosea felt about his daughter.

The name “Not Loved” was intended to shock the people and to teach the people a lesson about their own relationship with God. It was not given as a sign for Hosea’s daughter.

I do not see any evidence here that this strange name was ever intended to color Hosea’s own feelings about his own daughter. And perhaps Hosea went out of his way to show his love for his daughter - both as a lesson about the restoration that God was planning for his own people and perhaps as a way to make up somewhat for the dreadful name that he had given her!

Her name was intended as a sign for Israel, and we can imagine how Hosea used her name in his preaching. Here is how one commentary describes it:

The little girl was the text of Hosea’s sermons. The people heard that terrible name and no doubt whispered to one another, “Hosea’s wife is unfaithful; he must doubt that this child is his. He has rejected the poor thing!”

and Hosea could respond something like: “Do you trouble yourself over Lo-Ruhamah? I tell you, you are Lo-Ruhamah! God has turned his back on you!” He would be like Nathan with David: “You are the man!”

And **why** was she given that dreadful name? The text answers that question: “for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel.”

And I think that reason fits perfectly with what we just said. God is describing the break of a paternal bond. God would no longer have for Israel the compassion that a father shows to his children. God would no longer have the compassion that he shows to those who fear him. And whether we refer to that as “No Mercy” or “Not Loved,” I think the conclusion is the same: that special paternal bond that a parent has for a child had been lost.

Before we leave verse 6, let’s look at the much-debated phrase at the end of the verse: “to forgive them at all.” What does that mean? Is the ESV translation correct (“for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all”)?

Let’s start with that last question first - is the ESV translation correct? And in answering that question, we will also be judging virtually every other translation of that verse. They almost all translate the verse to say either (1) that God would not have mercy on Israel **and** would not forgive Israel or (2) to say that God would not have mercy on Israel **by** forgiving Israel.

Is either of those translations the correct translation? Perhaps not.

One Hebrew scholar describes the first translation as a “very questionable, and one might even say impossible, translation of the Hebrew.” And as for the second translation, he says that “if the Hebrew here means this, it is unlike any other Hebrew in the Bible.” According to him, the most obvious understanding of the Hebrew is that it means the **opposite**: “But I will certainly forgive them.”

If the English translations are correct and this Hebrew scholar is wrong, then the meaning is clear. God’s patience had run out with regard to Israel. The door had really be closed, and there was no re-opening it.

But what if that Hebrew scholar is right? What if - once again - we consider the possibility that the text means exactly what it says!

Where are we then? Can we explain how God could say to Israel, “I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel, but I shall certainly forgive them”?

First, as to the translation question, in my opinion the English translations are wrong. I think the text is saying that God **will** forgive them rather than saying that God **will not** forgive them. Why?

Because this is hardly the only example in Hosea where we see such a thing! Just look a few verse later!

Hosea 1:9-10 - ...for you are not my people, and I am not your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea...

We are used to the Bible telling us that one thing is true in one sense, but that the opposite is true in another sense. For example, we understand what Jesus means in Mark 10:31 when he tells us that the first shall be last, and we understand what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 12:10 when he says, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” But we usually have some context when that happens in the Bible. Hosea usually doesn’t give us much context here.

Remember in our introduction we made the point that Hosea places great demands on his readers. Here in verse 6 I think we see an example of that. “I will no longer show mercy to the house of Israel, but I shall certainly forgive them.”

What does that mean? Does verse 7 help? No. Verse 7 changes the subject! Then how are we to figure out how God could both have no mercy on someone while certainly forgiving them?

First, I think we may be seeing here what someone described as “the language of the vexation of a broken heart.” And here that broken heart is God’s heart. I think we will see that again near the end of the book.

Hosea 11:8 - How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

But second, I think we are seeing here something that we will see again and again in this book - **immediate** judgment and rejection, but with a **future** promise of blessing and restoration.

We must never forget that this book of Hosea, like every book in the Old Testament, is pointing us to Christ. I think that is what the end of verse 6 is doing - pointing to Christ and the kingdom of Christ. Yes, the judgment of Israel is coming, but so is the Messiah!

Hosea 1:7

7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

With verses 6 and 7, we see something that we will see again and again in this book - pessimism about Israel, but optimism about Judah. Verse 6 told us that Israel would have no mercy, but verse 7 tells us that Judah will have mercy.

Why the optimism? One reason may be that of the four southern kings we saw in verse 1, only one of them (Ahaz) was evil. The other three did what was right in the eyes of God.

But, if Hosea is from the north and is living and preaching in Israel, then why does Hosea have anything at all to say about Judah? Chapter 3 helps us answer that question.

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

The happy ending that God was planning for Israel (and everyone else) depended on King David, who was from the tribe of **Judah**. God could and did scatter Israel to the winds, but God could not do that to Judah. Why? Because God had made an unconditional promise to King David in Psalm 89 (and elsewhere) that one of David's descendants would reign forever from David's throne.

Psalm 89:34-36 - I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

That is why Hosea keeps talking about Judah in his message to Israel. It was because Israel's future blessings depended on Judah, as did the future blessings of the entire world.

Lesson 8

When we ended last week, we were about to look at the final phrase of Hosea 1:7.

7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. **I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.**”

That second phrase is a bit ambiguous and can have two different meanings.

On one hand, it can mean (as in the ESV) that God will not save Judah by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen; that is, God will not save Judah by its own military might.

But that same phrase in the Hebrew can also mean that God will not save Judah **from** bow or **from** sword or **from** war or **from** horses or **from** horsemen.

So which is correct? By or from? I think the context strongly favors the usual translation of “by” that we find in the ESV. The immediately preceding phrase (“I will save them **by** the LORD their God”) uses the same word, and there the word certainly does not mean “from.”

But I like what one commentary said on this point: “In a text as disorienting as this, it is easy to suppose that the ambiguity is deliberate.” And perhaps it is; it certainly made us stop and think.

Another reason I think that the ESV translation is correct is that Hosea 1:7 reminds us of a beautiful prophesy from Zechariah that we studied in an earlier class.

Zechariah 4:6 - Then he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

Zerubbabel (as we recall) was a descendant of King David - a vital link in the chain from David to Christ. (We find Zerubbabel's name both in Matthew 1:13 and in Luke 3:27.)

Hosea 1:7 and Zechariah 4:6 are each saying the same thing - the coming salvation would not arise from the might of man, but would come from the might of God. Daniel also told us that.

Daniel 2:44-45 - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain **by no human hand**, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

So what is God saying in verse 7? He is saying, I will not save Judah by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen - but I will save Judah! I will save them by the LORD their God!

Jeremiah told us about this great salvation, and he also told us when it would happen.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 - Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. **In those days, and at that time**, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. **In those days shall Judah be saved**, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

Oh, but I thought Judah was going to be saved when all the Jews were gathered together in Palestine at the end of the world when Jesus reigns for 1000 years in Jerusalem... Is that what Jeremiah just told us? No. Jeremiah said that Judah would be saved when God caused the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David - that is, when Jesus came into this world. That is a first century event that has already happened, not a final century event that hasn't happened.

Paul also told us about this salvation and also gave us the timing.

Romans 11:26-27 - And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

When was all Israel saved? When the Deliverer came out of Zion. Again, that was a first century event. And this great salvation was the gift of God; it did not arise by the power of man.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Or, as Hosea tells us, not by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen! But by the Lord their God!

Does God have a plan of salvation for the Jews? Absolutely he does. And it is the same plan that God has for everyone. It is the only plan; it is the gospel of Christ that was proclaimed in Acts 2 and is still being proclaimed today. And that gospel has not changed at all during those 2000 years.

So far we have met two of Gomer's three children - Jezreel and Not Loved. Let's now meet their little brother, Not Mine.

Hosea 1:8-9

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

In verses 8-9, Jezreel and Not Loved welcome a little brother into their family, and he is given the name Lo-Ammi, which means "Not Mine"!

Verse 8 tells us that Not Mine was born after Not Loved had been weaned. Two questions: how long was that time, and why are we told this?

As for the length of time, one commentary says it could have been three years because (it says) "children nursed longer in the ancient

world than today.” If that is correct, then what can we say about the three year period between the birth of Not Loved and the birth of Not Mine? Why are we provided that detail?

Some commentaries try to make that time period part of the metaphor, and talk, for example, about the patience of God. Perhaps - but I think that may be stretching things a bit too far. Later, when we get to chapter 3, we will discuss some events that may have happened in this three year time period.

I think a better explanation for why we have this detail is that it confirms what we said earlier - these are real people! This was a real marriage! These are real children! And this real child was born about three years after his sister and was given the very real name of Not Mine!

Perhaps God saved the worst name for last - Not Mine! What a name to give your child! There is an English word that carries the same meaning - and it is a word that we find in the Bible, at least in the KJV.

Deuteronomy 23:2 - A **bastard** shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD.

The Hebrew words are different, but the meanings are the same. If we did today what Hosea was commanded to do here the command would be to name our child that word we just read from Deuteronomy 23:2! This child was given a name that announced to all that he had been disowned by his father.

Whatever name the child had been given, with a mother like Gomer, you can be sure people would have wondered about his parentage. But with a name like this was anybody wondering whether this boy was Hosea’s actual son?

When a father names his son “Not Mine,” I think it is safe to say that everyone (including, and perhaps especially, the son) will immediately conclude that Hosea was not the boy’s father. But was that true? Was Hosea not the boy’s actual father?

The short answer (again) is that we don’t know - and likely neither did Hosea, despite the seeming certainty reflected by the child’s name.

And (again) that Hosea gave his son the name “Not Mine” does not tell us how Hosea himself felt about this child. Hosea gave his son that strange name because he was commanded by God to give his son that name. The name was intended as a sign for Israel, not as a sign for Hosea.

And what was the sign for Israel conveyed by the name of this little boy? It was the worst sign that they could have ever imagined. It was a sign that God was declaring his covenant with Israel to be null and void. It was a sign that God would consider Israel as God considered the Gentile world - not mine!

Earlier in their history the people had heard the **opposite** of what we see here in verse 9:

Exodus 6:7 - **I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God,** and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

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

And now? What were they hearing now? “You are **not** my people, and I am **not** your God.”

Israel could not have fallen any further away from God than that. God had disowned them, and God was announcing that fact to the world. You are not my people! I am not your God!

Yes, it was a shocking thing to hear, but, of course, the people should not have been shocked at all. Long before, God had told them exactly what would happen if they rejected him. Deuteronomy 28 details the curses that would come upon them if they turned away from God, as they had now done.

Deuteronomy 28:33 - A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see.

Deuteronomy 28:62 - Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 28:64 - And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

Those curses from Deuteronomy 28 form the backdrop of the book of Hosea. God had told the people at the beginning of their history what would happen if they disobeyed him, and Hosea has now shown up at the end of their history to say, "I told you so!"

And what do we see from God? Do we see any satisfaction with that "I told you so" from his prophet? No. What we see from God is heartbreak.

What we see is the heartbreak of a parent toward a child who it seems has been irretrievably lost. What we see is the heartbreak of a father about a relationship with his child that will seemingly never again be the same.

In his book *Bodies in Motion and at Rest*, the author Thomas Lynch wrote about looking at his son, passed out on the couch, after a string of arrests and drunk tanks and hospitalizations. And here is what he wrote:

"I want to remember him the way he was, that bright and beaming boy with the blue eyes and the freckles in the photos, holding the walleye on his grandfather's dock, or dressed in his first suit for his sister's grade-school graduation, or sucking his thumb while drawing at the kitchen counter, or playing his first guitar, or posing with the brothers from down the block on his first day of school."

Heartbreaking. And that is the same heartbreak we see from God in the book of Hosea. And some of the verses in Hosea are among the most heartbreaking verses found anywhere in the Bible or anywhere period.

Hosea 11:3 - Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk;
I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that
I healed them.

I taught my son to walk! I took him up by his arms! But he did not know.

There is no other way to see this book of Hosea other than as the anguish of a father about the sad state of his wayward children.

But is there no hope? Will the child never return? Will the great blessings that God had planned for his children never be enjoyed? Never be claimed? Will the son never arise from that couch free of that terrible burden? Let's keep reading.

Hosea 1:10-11

10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." 11 And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

What is the most beautiful word in the Bible? I suppose we could list many candidates, but at the top of my list would be two words - the words "yet" and "but."

How many times in the Bible does everything look hopeless until we reach a verse that begins with "yet" or "but"? I think of Romans 3, for example.

Romans 3:10-22 - As it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace

they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **But** now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

We see another example here in verses 10 and 11 of Hosea 1.

At the end of verse 9 everything looks about as bad as it can possibly be. At the end of verse 9 it looks like all hope is lost. And then we read verse 10, and the first word we read is “Yet!”

It all reminds me of Matthew 19:26 - “With man this is impossible, **but** with God all things are possible.” And there’s that word again! “**But** with God!”

So, here are our questions about verses 10-11: what is this wonderful thing being described here in these verses, and when and where will or did this wonderful thing happen?

Question #1: What is the wonderful thing described by verses 10 and 11?

First, let’s start with what is **NOT** the answer to that question. Whatever the wonderful thing in verse 10 is, it is **not** a wonderful thing that would be experienced in the lives of the people who were listening to Hosea.

How do we know that?

First, we know it because Hosea tells us what was in store for Israel in its immediate future - and it was anything but wonderful.

Hosea 13:16 - Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

Second, we know it because history confirms that nothing wonderful happened to rebellious Israel. Instead, the people lived through a succession of cut-throat kings until Assyria conquered them, killed them, exiled them, and scattered them.

And third, we know it because of the first promise in verse 10 - that “the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered.” The people were not hard to number at all in Hosea’s day. In fact, there were only about 60,000 “wealthy men” (likely meaning landholders) around this time.

How do we know that? I’m glad you asked. We know it because of math!

2 Kings 15:19-20 - Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

So, if N is the number of landholders, then King Menahem collected $50 \times N$ shekels of silver to pay the tribute of 1000 talents of silver. All we need to calculate N is to know the number of shekels in a talent of silver.

The number of shekels in a talent can be calculated from the account of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 38.

Exodus 38:25-26 - The silver from those of the congregation who were recorded was a hundred talents and 1,775 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary: a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, by the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone who was listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men.

If each of the 603,550 men brought half a shekel of silver, then the total number of shekels of silver was 301,775 shekels. The text tells us this sum was 100 talents and 1775 shekels of silver, which means that 100 talents of silver was 300,000 shekels. Thus, 1 talent of silver was 3,000 shekels silver.

Back to 2 Kings 15, we see that $50 \times N = 3,000,000$ shekels (1000 talents times 3000 shekels per talent). Solving for N, we get 60,000 men!

Sorry for all of that math - but I get so few opportunities!

Going back to the reason we did all of that math, we know that verse 10 cannot be describing current events in Israel because, far from being innumerable, the population at that time was quite easily numbered and was not very large. And it was certainly not large when compared with the quickly expanding Assyrian Empire!

So, for at least those three reasons, we know that verses 10-11 are not describing the **immediate** future of Israel. What's left? The **latter** future of Israel.

So does that mean we are looking for a time when the northern kingdom, the nation of Israel, would be like the sand of the sea and would be **physically** gathered together with Judah, the southern kingdom, under one leader?

Many today would say yes, and they would either point to the formation of Israel in 1948 or to some sort of premillennial kingdom that will be centered in Jerusalem at the end of the world.

There are many, many problems with both of those views, but one of those problems should be a show-stopper for those who hold those views. And what is that show-stopper? **Both Paul and Peter point back to verse 10, and both tell us that it was fulfilled in the first century.** Not 1948. Not the end of the world. But the first century.

Let's look at what Paul and Peter have to say about verse 10.

Paul quotes Hosea 1:10 in his lengthy discourse about the Jews in Romans 9-11.

Romans 9:25-26 - As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

(Note that Paul's quotation in Greek of Hosea 1:10 in Hebrew provides additional evidence for our earlier conclusion that the name of Hosea's daughter is better translated "Not Loved" than "No Mercy." In Romans 9:25, the translation we find is "not beloved.")

And Peter alludes to Hosea 1:10 in his first letter:

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

What do those verses tell us about Hosea 1:10?

Paul's point in Romans 9 was to convince the Jews that they, like the Gentiles, stood in need of the mercy of God.

Romans 9:16 - So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

And then later we read:

Romans 9:22-24 - What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience **vessels of wrath** prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for **vessels of mercy**, which he has prepared beforehand for glory — even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

And then in the next verse Paul quotes Hosea 1:10.

There is a dispute about whether Paul has Jews only or both Jews and Gentiles in mind with his quote from Hosea, and arguments can be made for both positions. But I think that dispute misses the point that is being made in Hosea 1:10.

What did we just see in the preceding verses of Hosea 1? What we saw was that, when it came to Israel, God was breaking the parental bond that a father has for his children. Israel had broken their covenant with God, and so the curses and the warnings from Deuteronomy 28 were now coming to pass.

Deuteronomy 28:62-64 - Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

So what did that mean with regard to the northern tribes after they were scattered by the Assyrians? **What it meant was that they would become like Gentiles.**

And, in fact, that is what happened. The Samaritans were a mixture of Jews from the northern kingdom and Gentiles brought in from Assyria.

2 Kings 17:24 - And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

2 Kings 17:34 - Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the LORD, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

The Samaritans of the New Testament were descendants of these people, and as John 4:9 tells us, “the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.”

What does that mean? What it means is that we don't need to spend much time worrying about whether Paul's quote from Hosea refers to just the Jews or to both Jew and Gentile. Why? Because even it refers only to Jews, it still includes people who were **considered** Gentiles.

In fact, isn't that Hosea's point in verse 9? "You are not my people, and I am not your God." God is speaking to Israel in that verse, and God is telling them that they would become like Gentiles to him, which is exactly what happened as evidenced by the Samaritans in the New Testament.

Yes, in a sense, the Samaritans were neither Jew nor Gentile, but a mixture of the two, but from a practical perspective the Samaritans were treated no differently than Gentiles by the Jews of the first century.

And what was true for those in Israel who were now considered as Gentiles was also true for the actual Gentiles. In fact, it was the inclusion of the Gentiles in the plan of God that provided this hope for those who had once been God's people but who were no longer his people.

The Jews who rebelled against God stood in need of the same mercy as the Gentiles needed - and that was the precise point that Paul was making in Romans 9 when he quoted Hosea.

So what can we say about Hosea 1:10? I think we can say that it has the Gentiles in mind when it talks about those who are not God's people instead becoming the children of the living God.

In the immediate context of Hosea 1, those Gentiles were the Jews from the northern tribes who were scattered and mixed with the Assyrians. But the truth of Hosea 1:10 went beyond that group. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 9 and what Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2.

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

So I think we can now answer our first question: what is the wonderful thing described by verses 10 and 11 of Hosea 1?

That wonderful thing is the gospel of Christ! It is the good news. And there cannot be any better news than to hear that "in the place

where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'" The relationship has been restored!

And is there any other way apart from the gospel that someone who is not a child of God can become a child of God? If not, then the wonderful thing in Hosea 1:10 must be the gospel.

1 John 3:1-2 - See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called **children of God**; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, **we are God's children now**, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

So the answer to the first question is the gospel, and with that first answer I think we also have an answer to our next question.

Question #2: When will or did this wonderful thing happen?

Didn't John just answer that question? "We are God's children **now**," he wrote in 1 John 3:2.

And didn't Paul answer that question in Romans 9:24? "Even us whom **he has called**, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?"

And didn't Peter answer that question in 1 Peter 2:10? "Once you were not a people, but **now** you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but **now** you have received mercy."

And don't we all know when the gospel was first proclaimed?

The wonderful blessing of Hosea 1:10 was not a blessing in the immediate future of Israel, but was instead a blessing in the later future of Israel - and it was the same blessing that came to the entire world - both Jew and Gentile - with the coming of Christ and the gospel of Christ in the first century.

Question #3: Where did this wonderful thing happen?

Where? Why are we asking that question? We are asking it because verses 10-11 appear to describe a particular place where this wonderful thing will happen.

Hosea 1:10-11 - And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.” And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from **the land**, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Where is this place? Where is this land?

Let's start first with the place, and I think what we see with that word in verse 10 is the same prophecy that we see elsewhere in the Old Testament - that the gospel of Christ would be proclaimed first in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:3 - For **out of Zion** shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD **from Jerusalem**.

And we see also see the first century fulfillment of that prophecy.

Luke 24:45-47 - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, **beginning from Jerusalem**.”

Lesson 9

When we ended last week we were looking at Hosea 1:10-11, and we had three questions: what is this wonderful thing being described here in these verses, and when and where will or did this wonderful thing happen?

We had answered the first two questions: the wonderful thing in verses 10-11 is the gospel of Christ, and that wonderful thing appeared in the first century.

As for the third question, we had looked at the “place” in verse 10 and determined that it was Jerusalem. The gospel was proclaimed first in Jerusalem.

And the “land” in Hosea 1:11? Where is that land? I think we have two likely options, and both options may be intended.

The first option is that the land in verse 11 is the same as the place in verse 10, and both are describing the proclamation of the gospel beginning from Jerusalem.

But a second option is that going up from the land in verse 11 refers to a resurrection. Not a physical resurrection of the body, but rather the spiritual resurrection experienced by those who hear and obey the gospel.

Daniel 12:2 - And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Luke 2:34 - And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel...”

Romans 6:4 - We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised

from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

And if that second view of the “land” in verse 11 seems a bit far-fetched in the context of Hosea 1, we need to consider two more pieces of evidence.

First, think again about the name Jezreel, which we see again at the end of verse 11. As we said before, the Hebrew word Jezreel means “God scatters.” And we said that the name Jezreel thus included a judgment - God would scatter the people of Israel.

But that same Hebrew word meaning “God scatters” can also be seen as a blessing - it can mean instead that “God sows” or “God plants.”

And what do we see at the end of verse 11? Do we see Jezreel used as a curse or as a blessing? We see it used as a blessing! “And they shall go up from the land, **for great shall be the day of Jezreel.**”

I think that word “Jezreel” provides support for the notion that verse 11 is talking about a resurrection. And the context tells us that it is a spiritual resurrection - the point at which we, who were previously not a people, became the people of God.

And the second piece of evidence? That comes from Ezekiel, who spoke not to Israel before their deportation, but to Judah after their deportation. And what did Ezekiel tell them? He told them much the same that we see here in Hosea 1:10-11.

In Hosea 1:11, Hosea said that Judah and Israel will be gathered together. What did Ezekiel say?

Ezekiel 37:19 - Say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand.

In Hosea 1:11, Hosea said the people would have one head. What did Ezekiel say?

Ezekiel 37:22 - And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall

be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.

And what else do we see in Ezekiel 37? We see a great resurrection in the valley of dry bones!

Ezekiel 37:11-14 - Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

When did Judah and Israel once again become one kingdom? When did Judah and Israel once again have one king over them all? When did Judah and Israel experience a spiritual resurrection?

That all happened in the first century with the gospel of Christ. And it still happens to day. Those who are in the kingdom of Christ are united in one body, have one king, and have been raised to walk in newness of life. Hosea 1:10-11 is describing the gospel of Christ and the wonderful blessings that Jesus brought to the entire world.

One final question about verse 11 - that verse says that “they shall **appoint** for themselves one head.” If, as we have said, Jesus is that “one head,” then what does it mean when the text says that Jesus was **appointed**?

I think what we see with that word is an idiom describing the selection of a king. We see the same language elsewhere.

Deuteronomy 17:15 - You may indeed **set a king over you** whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers **you shall set as king over you**. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

1 Samuel 8:5 - And said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now **appoint for us a king** to judge us like all the nations.”

We did not appoint Jesus king anymore than the Jews appointed their earthly kings. We know that God chose their first king (Saul) in 1 Samuel 9:16 as well as their second king (David) in 1 Samuel 16:1. And, likewise, it was God (not us) who crowned Jesus king (Hebrews 1:8-9; Hebrews 2:7-9).

Here in verse 11 the word “appointment” points us back to the crowning of Saul and the crowning of David, and it looks forward to the crowning of Christ to reign forever on the throne of David. Each was crowned **by God**, and the people then recognized that person as their king.

Here in verse 11 the promise is that all the people would recognize this one leader as their one king. In the days of Hosea, that had not been the case in the divided kingdom for centuries. But the promise of verse 11 is that in the future the people would once again be united under one king.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

That king and that righteous Branch of Jeremiah 23 is the one head of Hosea 1:11. That king is Christ, and the wonderful blessing of Hosea 1:10-11 is the gospel of Christ and the salvation enjoyed by all in the kingdom of Christ.

Hosea 2:1-2

1 Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.” 2 “Plead with your mother, plead-- for she is not my wife, and I am not her

husband-- that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;

Verse 1 is a transition verse. It is linked to the end of chapter 1 by its optimism, and it is linked to the verses that follow by the imperatives that are used - "say" in verse 1 and "plead" in verse 2.

Our first question about verse 1 is this: who are these brothers and sisters? As far as we have been told, we have two brothers and one sister among the three children of Gomer. Also, the word "say" here is plural, so to which group is this command addressed?

Although we previously raised the possibility that Gomer had children before she married Hosea, I think the better view for verse 1 is that the focus has shifted from the children of Gomer to the people represented by those children. I think the command in verse 1 is directed to the people of Israel, and they are, in effect, being told to say these things to each other.

And what are they told to say to themselves? "You are my people."
"You have received mercy."

But how can that be? How can God tell "Not Mine" that "you are my people"? How can God tell "Not Loved" that "you have received mercy"?

The answer is what we saw at the end of Chapter 1. The answer is the gospel of Christ. That is how people who are not God's people can become God's people. That is how people who are not loved with a special parental bond can receive mercy as a father shows to his children. That is what Paul told us in Romans 9, and that is what Peter told us in 1 Peter 2.

But what about the present tense ("you are my people") and the past tense ("you have received mercy")?

At the end of chapter 1, we were seeing these promised blessings in the future tense ("it shall be said to them" and "they shall go up"). That in the very next verse we see those same blessings in both the present tense and the past tense just shows how certain they are. God was going to bless the entire world through Jesus Christ, and that blessing was so certain the tense of the verb did not matter. Here in just two verses (1:11 and 2:1) we see those blessings described in the future tense, the present tense, and the past tense.

That explains how verse 1 is a transition from the preceding verses. But how is verse 1 a transition to the verses that follow it? That is a tougher question. Look again at verse 2.

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

The first word in verse 2 in the ESV is “plead.” The ASV uses the word “contend,” and the NIV uses the word “rebuke.” I think a better translation than any of those is to use the word “renounce.”

Verse 2 is a warning to the children. Yes, they are in bad situation now, and yes, they are promised a restored situation later. But what comes in between? The answer is found in verse 2. These children must set themselves apart from their mother. They must denounce what she has done.

Why? Why must they denounce her? The remainder of verse 2 answers that question. They must renounce their mother because “she is not my wife, and I am not her husband.” And that reason confirms that this is not Hosea speaking about Gomer but rather is God speaking about Israel. Hosea and Gomer were still husband and wife, but this verse tells us that God and Israel were not.

In chapter 1 we saw a break in the parental bond between God and Israel. Here in verse 2 of chapter 2 we see break in the marriage bond between God and Israel. “She is not my wife, and I am not her husband.”

And so what is happening here? What is happening is that the marriage has broken up, and the children are being asked to choose a side. God is telling them to denounce their mother.

As we have said, Hosea is using two different metaphors here for Israel - Israel is a mother in verse 2, and Israel is the children of that mother in verse 1. What that means is that Israel is being told here to denounce Israel! I think we finally need to figure out what those two different metaphors are describing.

So here are our questions: what aspect of Israel is represented here by Gomer, and what aspect of Israel is represented here by the children of Gomer?

To answer those questions, let's look again at verse 2, where the children were told to denounce their mother. What did God want the Israelites to denounce? Wasn't it their current culture and everything about it? And what do we mean by culture? Doesn't their culture include their governmental institutions and leaders and their religious institutions and leaders? And weren't their kings evil cutthroats, and weren't their religious leaders followers of Baal?

Everything about their culture was opposed to God, and these people - like children - had been reared and influenced by that evil culture. And God wanted them to denounce it all! God wanted them to reject the spiritual adultery of that evil culture - or, as verse 2, says, "that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts."

I think the children represent Israel as the ordinary people of Israel, and the mother of those children represents Israel as the degenerate culture that raised those children.

That explains how, in verse 2, Israel is being told to denounce Israel. It explains why these children were being told to denounce their mother. God wanted them to renounce the evil culture in which they lived and of which they were a part.

And that is not just a command for this ancient people in the days of Hosea. We see the same command for us in the New Testament, along with the same promise.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 - Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, **and they shall be my people**. Therefore go out from their midst, **and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing**; then I will welcome you, and **I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me**, says the Lord Almighty."

What fellowship has light with darkness? We must choose one or the other. And that is what God is commanding his people to do in verse 2 - denounce your mother!

Whose children were they? We have said before that there is some question in our mind (and likely in Hosea's mind) about whether all of his children are really his children. But here, these children are being asked to choose - whose children are they? Children of the living God? Or children of their own evil culture? How they respond to the command in verse 2 will answer that question.

What is meant by the phrase "that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts"?

Putting promiscuity away from her face may refer to characteristic tattoos or cosmetics that denoted a prostitute. And putting away adultery from her breasts may denote pieces of jewelry or trinkets that likewise denoted a prostitute at that time.

The meaning is clear - the people must denounce their mother by telling her to abandon her old ways and everything that went along with her old ways.

And what if that does not happen? Keep reading.

Hosea 2:3

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

Verse 3 is describing what would happen if the children did not denounce their mother and her ways. Verse 3 is describing what would happen if the people chose their mother over God. Verse 3 is describing what would happen if their mother did not heed her children and change her ways. And sadly, verse 3 is describing what actually happened to Israel in the days of Hosea. They rejected God, and so God rejected them, and Assyria conquered and scattered them.

How is all of that described here? In two ways - as an adulterous woman being stripped naked by her husband, and as her land being turned into a desert.

Before we look at these two punishments, let's ask an initial question: is any or all of this autobiographical? That is, is Hosea describing here in chapter 2 his own life with Gomer and her children? Did he ask his own children to say to Gomer the things we looked at in verse 2? Is Hosea here in verse 3 threatening to strip Gomer naked. Later in verse 10, will Hosea display Gomer naked in front of her lovers?

Although the commentaries differ on this question, my opinion is that the answer is no. I think when we started chapter 2 we moved to the relation between God and Israel. Yes, that marriage is depicted as a sign by the marriage between Hosea and Gomer, but I don't think we have to conclude that all of the details here in chapter 2 also applied to Hosea and Gomer.

But, with all of that said, we can't be completely certain on that question. It may be that Gomer and Hosea experienced some of what we read in chapter 2, or perhaps much or all of it. We will have more to say on that question when we get to chapter 3.

But whether any or all of chapter 2 applied to Hosea and Gomer, the primary point of the chapter is that it all applied to God and Israel. The book of Hosea is not intended to teach us about Hosea and his relationship with Gomer. Instead, the book of Hosea is intended to teach us about God and his relationship with Israel.

So now let's go back and look at the two punishments we see in verse 3: an adulterous woman being stripped naked by her husband, and her land being turned into a desert.

Some commentaries argue that public exposure was used as a punishment for adultery, and perhaps it was, but I'm not sure they have made their case. Much of their evidence comes from the prophets such as Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Jeremiah 13:26 - Therefore will I also uncover thy skirts upon thy face, and thy shame shall appear.

Ezekiel 16:37 - Therefore behold, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them against thee on every side, and will uncover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.

It's hard to know from those verses whether public exposure was an Israelite divorce practice or was instead just a common depiction of shame used by the prophets.

As for the punishment for adultery, the Law of Moses proscribed something else.

Leviticus 20:10 - And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

So what does the public nakedness denote? Most likely it points toward the exile that was coming for Israel due to her spiritual adultery. In the ancient world captives were often taken away naked, and ancient art work routinely depicted departing exiles as naked.

I think this view is strengthened by verse 10 (which we will get to later).

Hosea 2:10 - And now will I uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand.

With Israel, her lovers were the foreign nations Israel trusted and the foreign gods Israel worshipped. Assyria was one such nation, and it was Assyria that led Israel away naked in her exile. As one commentary described it:

“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.”

And what about the second punishment - the parched land?

The parched land works with the nakedness to complete the picture of someone who has been humiliated and abandoned to her fate with nothing to protect her.

The two metaphors come together when the woman dies of thirst in the desert. The point is that Israel will be humiliated and lose everything, the land will be emptied, and the people will go into exile.

Hosea 2:4

4 Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom.

Verse 4 continues the description of what would happen if the children did not denounce their mother and her ways, and if their mother did not heed her children and change her ways.

And what does verse 4 tell us would happen? One again we see that God would have no mercy on them. As we saw with the birth of Gomer's second child, the parental bond between God and Israel would be broken.

Why? Because by their actions they would have shown that they were children of whoredom. That is, they would have chosen Israel their mother over God their father.

But how do we reconcile this with what we saw in verse 1?

“Say to your brothers,” “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”

The answer is simple. Verse 1, as we said, is showing the great future blessing that awaited Israel, and verse 4 is showing their present grim reality if they refused to change their ways.

Hosea 2:4 is simply repeating what we saw in Hosea 1:6 - “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel.” And also what we saw in Hosea 1:2 - “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”

But why? Why do we see these statements repeated, some times saying that there is no mercy and other times saying that there is mercy?

- **Hosea 1:6** - Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel.
- **Hosea 2:1** - Say ... to your sisters, “You have received mercy.”
- **Hosea 2:4** - Upon her children also I will have no mercy.
- **Hosea 2:23** - And I will have mercy on No Mercy.

So which is it? Mercy or no mercy? The answer is that it is both, but not at the same time. In their immediate future, Israel would find no mercy. In their latter future, Israel would find mercy - along with everyone else when Jesus came to bless the entire world - both Jew and Gentile.

Titus 2:11 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.

But why do we see the back and forth in Hosea? Why no mercy, then mercy, then no mercy, then mercy?

I think the answer is simple. Each time God gives Israel the bad news, he almost immediately gives them the good news! I think this repeated back and forth that we see in Hosea is just more evidence of God's love.

Lesson 10

Last week we started chapter 2, and we saw that it represents Israel in two different ways. First, Israel is a mother, and second, Israel is the children of that mother. The description of Israel as a mother is directed to the Israelite society that was totally opposed to the way of God. And the description of Israel as the children of that mother is directed to the ordinary people of Israel who had been born and raised in that evil society. Verse 5 continues the description of the mother that we saw last week.

Hosea 2:5

5 For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'

The doubts about the parentage of Hosea's children arise once again in verse 5. We are told that she who conceived them has acted shamefully. Does that mean they are not Hosea's children? And again, we aren't given a definitive answer.

Why does this issue keep coming up? I think the answer is that God is creating these doubts because he wants the people to have those same doubts about their own parentage. Are they children of God or are they children of Baal? Who is their real father?

And, again, the focus here is Israel, not Gomer. Gomer is just a sign or a living illustration. Hosea's message is directed to Israel, not to Gomer. Gomer has receded into the background and Israel has moved to the foreground.

The children are the people of Israel, and their mother is their own evil culture that was opposed to God and that gave birth to and reared the people of Israel.

The nation of Israel had played the whore. The nation of Israel had acted shamefully. The nation of Israel had gone after her lovers to get the dues of her trade - bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink.

In what way had Israel done these things?

There were two primary ways in which Israel played the whore, and I think we see both of them at play here in verse 5.

First, Israel played the whore with Baal.

We haven't said much about Baal yet, so let's take a closer look now at Baal and Baalism. The false god Baal is an evil thread that runs all through the Bible.

Baal was the Canaanite storm god and the bringer of rain. As the bringer of rain, Baal was also considered the god of fertility, and the followers of Baal performed sexual acts in their worship of Baal. Worship of Baal also involved child sacrifice.

Jeremiah 19:5 - And have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind.

Hosea 2:5 includes a subtle reference to Baal even without mentioning Baal by name because in that verse we see both of the primary benefits that were believed to be provided by Baal - children and agriculture.

The worshippers of Baal believed that Baal was the source of fertility, and so the mother in verse 5 would have thanked Baal for her children and for the agricultural gifts she received from her lovers.

One commentary suggests that the phrase in verse 5 - "who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink" - may have been a fragment of a fertility cult hymn that the people sang in their worship of Baal. And keep in mind that it is possible that Gomer was a follower of Baal and had worked as a prostitute in a temple of Baal.

Baal was a part of the religion of almost every culture in the ancient Near East, and sometimes was referred to by other names.

It is possible that Hadad (meaning thunderer) was the proper name of Baal, although Baal is never called that name in the Bible (except maybe in Zechariah 12:11). But we do see a number of Aramean kings with the name Hadad, and they may have been named for their false god.

In addition to Baal, the Canaanite pantheon included El (the father of the gods), Asherah (El's wife), Ashtoreth (one of Baal's wives and the goddess of love), Anath (Baal's second wife, the goddess of war), and Dagon (the god of vegetation). Baal is sometimes called the son of El and sometimes called the son of Dagon.

It is important to note that the word "Baal" in the Bible does not always refer to the false god Baal. Sometimes the word is used as a verb meaning "to marry" or "to have dominion over."

Deuteronomy 24:1 - When a man hath taken a wife, and **married** her...

And sometimes the word "Baal" just means "husband."

Proverbs 12:4 - A virtuous woman is a crown to her **husband**...

And sometimes the word "Baal" is used as a synonym for "Lord," even in reference to God.

1 Chronicles 14:11 - Then David said, God hath broken in upon mine enemies by mine hand like the breaking forth of waters: therefore they called the name of that place **Baalperazim** [the Lord bursts out].

And we see the word "Baal" in the names of some of Saul's relatives, where the word is again referring to God.

1 Chronicles 8:33-34 - And Ner begat Kish, and Kish begat Saul, and Saul begat Jonathan, and Malchishua, and Abinadab, and **Eshbaal** [Man of the Lord]. And the son of Jonathan was **Meribbaal** [the Lord contends].

It is interesting that Samuel gave us a different name for Saul's son, Eshbaal.

2 Samuel 2:8 - But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took **Ishbosheth** the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim.

Why the change from Ish-baal in 1 Chronicles to Ish-bosheth in 2 Samuel? I think 2 Samuel was making an editorial comment! The Hebrew word “bosheth” means shame! So 2 Samuel replaced Ish-baal (man of the Lord) with Ish-bosheth (man of shame).

What that tells us is that, although the word “baal” started off as a neutral term, it did not stay that way for very long. I think we may soon see some evidence for that same change of attitude here in Hosea 2.

Hosea 2:17 - For **I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth**, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.

From the conquest of Canaan up until the Babylonian captivity, the worship of Baal was a constant temptation to the people of Israel. The first recorded incident is found in Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-3 - While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. **So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor**. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

And it happened again and again after that. In the book of Judges we see a cycle in which the people would reject God and turn to Baal instead, followed by oppression by some foreign power, leading to repentance, and liberation through a judge sent by God who steered the people away from Baal.

Just prior to the monarchy, the people confessed to having worshiped Baal up until that point.

1 Samuel 7:3-4 - And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand

of the Philistines.” **So the people of Israel put away the Baals** and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.

After the kingdom was divided, Baal became the national religion of Israel under King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, whose father was Eth-baal, the king of Sidon.

1 Kings 16:30-32 - And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.

If you ever have any doubts about the great damage that only one person can do, study the life of Jezebel!

And, as Elijah described, the followers of Baal in Israel persecuted those who sought to follow God.

1 Kings 19:10 - He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

That Baal was the storm god supplies some important context for the severe drought announced by Elijah.

1 Kings 17:1 - Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”

That pronouncement was not only an announcement of God’s superiority over Baal, but it was also an announcement of the death of Baal because, in their myths, the worshipers of Baal equated drought with the death of Baal. That fact explains the desperation we see from the followers of Baal on Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:27-29 - And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

Although Baal was defeated on Mount Carmel, the worship of Baal did not end there. Ahab's son, Ahaziah, followed in the steps of his evil father.

2 Kings 1:1-2 - Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness."

Baalzebub means Lord of the Flies, and that title may have been intended as a mockery of the title Lord of the High Places or Exalted Lord. The only difference in Hebrew between "flies" and "exalted" is a single letter.

I mentioned earlier that Baal was an evil thread that ran throughout the Bible, and we see that thread even in the New Testament. The Jewish scribes said that Jesus was possessed by Baalzebub in Mark 3:22, and that unbelievably horrible statement was immediately followed by Jesus' description of the unforgivable sin in Mark 3:28-30.

As for the southern kingdom, Judah, the worship of Baal was introduced by Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who married Jehoram, the son of King Jehoshaphat. Jehoram followed his wife in worshipping Baal, as did his son, Ahaziah.

2 Kings 8:18 - And he [Jehoram] walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: for the daughter of Ahab was his wife: and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

2 Kings 8:27 - And he [Ahaziah] walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the LORD,

as did the house of Ahab: for he was the son in law of the house of Ahab.

And, as we have seen, Ahaziah was shot and killed by Jehu at Jezreel, and his mother, Athaliah, almost wiped out the line of King David.

2 Kings 10:28 tells us that Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel, but (again) that did not last very long as we will see here in the book of Hosea.

And so the first way that Israel was playing the whore (as Hosea 2:5 tells us) was that Israel was playing the whore with Baal.

Second, Israel played the whore with foreign nations.

Hosea 7:11 - Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.

We have already seen how Israel made alliances with foreign countries (such as Egypt and Assyria) and trusted in those foreign nations instead of trusting in God and viewed those foreign nations as the source of their blessings rather than God.

We will see more evidence of this misplaced trust - both as to Baal and to foreign alliances - as we continue through chapter 2.

Hosea 2:6-7

6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths.
7 She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.'

Starting in verse 5 and continuing in verses 6-7 we see a cycle that repeatedly occurs not only in Hosea but in the entire Bible: sin, punishment, and redemption.

We saw the **sin** in verse 5 - "I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink."

We see the **punishment** in verses 6-7 - "I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her," and "she shall pursue

her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them.”

And we see **redemption** in verse 7 - “I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.”

And we won't have to wait very long to see this cycle repeated!

Later, in verse 8, we will again see the **sin**.

In verses 9-13, we will again see the **punishment**.

And in verses 14-23, we will again see the **redemption**.

Verse 7 does not promise redemption, but it does anticipate redemption. Verse 7 tells us that there will be a change of attitude in which the mother considers a return to her first husband.

Later in verse 16, this anticipated return will be repeated with more detail: “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ ”

In verses 7-8, the punishment is that she would be blocked from pursuing her lovers. She would be cut off from them by a hedge of thorns and by a wall.

And, of course, this punishment from God was done for her own good - to keep her from causing more harm to herself or to her children, and to cause her to reconsider her ways and return to her first husband.

As a result of this punishment, verse 7 tells us that she will pursue her lovers but not overtake them. The word translated “pursue” in verse 7 literally means to diligently hunt down. (She is not playing hard to get!) She is chasing them, but God has put a hedge and a wall in her way to slow her down in that pursuit.

And what is the result?

Look back at verse 5 - “**I will go** after my lovers...”

And now look at verse 7 - “**I will go** and return to my first husband...”

The Hebrew is more emphatic - literally, it reads, “Let me go,” or “I want to go.”

Verses 5 and 7 start off the same, but they do not end the same. In verse 5, the woman demands to go to her lovers, but in verse 7 the woman demands to return to her husband.

But why? Why does she want to return to her husband? Because of her great love for him? Or instead is verse 7 showing us only that she is still following her own self-interest, and now that she is blocked from her lovers, she sees her first husband as the next best option. Perhaps her only motive is to follow her reward - either a reward from her lovers or a reward from her husband.

But perhaps we should wait and see how this all turns out before making that judgment. After all, verse 7 reminds us a bit of the prodigal son who also returned home when he became hungry and who also returned home with the stated goal of improving his current position.

Before we leave these verses, I think we can see a warning for ourselves here. We, like the people in Hosea's day, need to be on our guard against religious syncretism.

What is religious syncretism? It is the mixing and merging of one religion with another.

If you had asked these people whether they believed in God, most or perhaps all of them would have quickly answered yes. But they also believed in Baal, and they had mixed the true worship of God with the false worship of Baal - and that mixing is called syncretism.

We see an example of syncretism on the handout for Lesson 10. At the top of the page, we see a marker that was created to thank God "and his Asherah (Baal's mother)." We see some something very similar in 2 Kings 21.

2 Kings 21:7 - And the carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.

The "he" in that verse was King Manasseh of Judah, but we know that the same syncretism also happened and was even more widespread in Israel.

And what was the cause of the syncretism? It was primarily the same thing that drive polytheism in the first place - superstition.

If one God is good, then many gods must be better! And why should we risk offending some god by not giving him his due? If we want the rain to come and the crops to grow, then why not seek that from every god we can find? Why not also look to this god of fertility? And, of course, we can also keep looking to God.

But that is not how God demands to be worshipped, and we can see that from the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:2-6 - I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Yes, syncretism is bad, but syncretism is just a problem for those poor deluded ancient Israelites, right? We don't need to guard against syncretism today, right? Wrong and wrong!

Although we may not be tempted today to bow down to an image of Baal, we are still tempted to have two masters. We still face temptations today to put our faith in God and in something or someone else - to hedge our bets so to speak.

- I have faith in God, but I also have faith in my bank account.
- I have faith in God, but I also have faith in science.
- I have faith in God, but I also have faith in worldly wisdom.
- I have faith in God, but I also have faith in someone or something else.

When we mix those things with God to the point that we have created a mixed religion, then we have become guilty of syncretism.

Matthew 4:10 - Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written," "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Luke 16:13 - No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

But we would never do these things, right? We would never attribute the wonderful working of the universe to someone other than the creator of that wonderful universe, right? Ever hear of **Mother Nature**? Who is that?

Here is a pertinent quote from an 1885 commentary on Hosea:

It seems to us strange folly. They attributed to gods, who represented the functions of nature, the power to give what God alone gives. How is it different, when men now say, "nature does this, or that," or speak of "the operations of nature," or the laws of "nature," and ignore God Who appoints those laws, and worketh hitherto "those operations?"

Like Hosea's listeners, we also need to make sure we give credit where credit is due!

And there is another lesson here for our own society. What was almost certainly the primary reason why the worship of Baal quickly became so popular? What was the reason that the worship of Baal kept coming back after it had been removed from the land?

I think we can answer that question with one word - sex. Baalism was a fertility cult, and the temples of Baal were nothing more than brothels.

And what is the lesson there for us? It is this: **the surest sign of a man-made religion is a "special revelation" from God for its followers (and most often its leaders) to engage in sexual immorality.**

That is certainly true of this ancient fertility cult, but can we think of any more modern examples?

- How about Islam? Muhammad said that he had a dream in which he was instructed to marry the six year old daughter of his best friend.
- How about mormonism? In 1830, Joseph Smith claimed that God commanded him to take multiple wives, and Smith's first polygamous union was with the 16-year-old daughter of a neighboring Mormon family. Nine of Smith's first dozen wives were the spouses of his closest friends.
- How about David Koresh?

And we could go on and on, but we all know the truth on that subject.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 - Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

One more question about verse 8 - did this redemption actually occur? Yes and no.

No, the redemption in verse 8 did not occur in the immediate future of the people. It could have occurred; the door was open for it to occur; but it did not occur. Instead, the people persisted in their rebellion and idolatry, and Assyria defeated them and scattered them.

But yes, this redemption in verse 8 did occur later when the gospel was proclaimed to both Jew and Gentile, and the people of Israel (who in the first century had become Samaritans and were considered Gentiles) were offered salvation in Christ. We see the fulfillment of this promise in John 4 when Jesus speaks to the **Samaritan** woman at the well.

John 4:13-14 - Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

That promise of eternal life was spoken by Jesus to a descendant of the same people who were hearing the word of God from the prophet Hosea.

Sometimes when we read Old Testament promises to Israel we hear the argument that some promise must be a promise for the end of the world because the promise is so wonderful - but let me ask you this: could any promise be more wonderful than the promise of Christ in John 4? "The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." And we know that that promise was a first century promise! It was the promise of the gospel which is still available today for all who will come and drink from that well! And if anyone today is waiting for a more wonderful promise than the gospel of Christ, they will have a very long wait because there could be no greater promise than that!

Lesson 11

In verse 8, we see a continued description of the woman, who represents the evil society and culture of Israel. And starting in verse 8, we again see the cycle that we saw earlier in this same chapter.

- In verse 8, we again see the sin.
- In verses 9-13, we again see the punishment.
- And in verses 14-23, we again see the redemption.

Hosea 2:8

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

Notice the pronouns in verse 8 - **She** did not know, and **they** used for Baal.

That switch from singular to plural confirms what we have been saying about chapter 2 all along - the focus here has shifted from Gomer the person to Israel the people for whom Gomer was a sign.

By any measure, verse 8 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. It reaches back to and depends on verse 5.

I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.

But verse 8 reaches back much further than that! After all that God had done for Israel throughout its entire history, Israel had reached the low point of verse 8 in which Israel was thanking Baal for the gifts of God!

The grain, the wine, and the oil had all come from God, but the people had given the credit for those gifts to Baal.

And note that these three examples - grain, wine, and oil - are all examples of food that come from God without being processed and transformed by human hands. These gifts had come straight from God to their tables.

And God did not just give them these basic commodities, but God also gave them luxuries - verse 8 tells us that silver and gold had been lavished on her by God.

And what did the people do with those gifts from God?

Look at the handout for Lesson 10 - in the lower left you can see a statue of Baal than is overlaid with gold. That is what is described in verse 10 - “Who lavished on her silver and gold, **which they used for Baal.**” Or perhaps better (in view of the handout) as another translation renders it, “**which they made into Baal.**” The people took the gifts of God and made false idols with them.

So the people were guilty of two things - they were not thankful to God for the blessings that he had given them, and they used those blessings for purposes that were opposed to God.

The people thought Baal was the god of fertility, but fertility was a blessing from the one true God. And the people **should** have known that - and, in fact, they **would** have know that had they been following the law as they should.

In the Feast of Firstfruits, the people were intended to acknowledge that the bounty of their promised land was a gift from God.

Leviticus 23:9-14 - And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, **When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted.** On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. **And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD.** And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an

ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: **it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.**

But the people had rejected all of that in favor of their sex-crazed worship of Baal. They had forgotten what God had done for them and was still doing for them. They had rejected this “statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

And worse, in rejecting this feast celebrating the gifts of God, the people had turned their back on the greatest gift of all. Look again at Leviticus 23:12.

And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD.

The gifts, the feast, the thankfulness, the sacrifice - they were all pointing to Christ (as were all of the other Jewish feasts). And so when the people looked to Baal instead of looking to God, they were telling God that they neither wanted nor needed any gifts from him - **including the gift of his son.**

So does that mean the people weren't celebrating this feast at all? No. In fact, later in verse 11 we will see that they were still keeping the appointed feasts.

But they were just going through the motions. They were just feasting to have a good time with their friends and to take off time from work. There was no thought behind any of it. They were keeping the feasts, but they were not keeping God. And worse, they had turned the feasts of God into feasts of Baal.

And not only had the people not credited God for the gifts he had given them, but they had then heaped those gifts on a false god!

There is a great lesson here for us - not only must we be thankful for all that God has given and is giving us, but we have a responsibility to use those gifts in service to him. If we were instead to use those gifts for some evil purpose, then how would we be any different from

the people of Hosea's day who took the gold and silver from God and used it to overlay a statue of Baal?

As we study Hosea, we need to keep in mind that the Bible is both a window and a mirror. Yes, I can look through that window and see the horrible sin of ancient Israel, but I also need to look at that mirror and see the same sin in my own life. I need to look for the gold-covered statues of Baal in my own life.

There is a key word in verse 8. For the first time, Hosea uses the word "know."

One commentary says that that one little word - "know" - "as much as any single word captures the essence of what God wants and what Israel is lacking. Intimacy, loyalty, and obedience - the three-fold cord of the covenant - are braided together in this word."

There are two Hebrew words in Hosea translated "know" and "knowledge," and each occurrence of those two words in Hosea is shown on the handout for Lesson 11. Perhaps the best known use of the word in Hosea is found in Hosea 4:6 - "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." And whatever else that verse may tell us, one thing it tells us for certain is that this knowledge is extremely important! What we don't know can destroy us!

The Hebrew word translated "know" in verse 8 is the word "yada," and that word is used in many ways in the Bible.

Genesis 3:22 - And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to **know** [yada] good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.

Genesis 4:1 - And Adam **knew** [yada] Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

Exodus 1:8 - Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which **knew** [yada] not Joseph.

Deuteronomy 7:9 - **Know** [yada] therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.

This knowledge is not just an academic knowledge. Although it does include such knowledge, it also includes much more. This knowledge is an **academic** knowledge that is also an **intimate** knowledge and an **experiential** knowledge.

Here, the woman did not **know** [yada] that God had given her these gifts. What does that mean?

The use of the same word “know” in Genesis 4:1 (“And Adam **knew** Eve his wife”) is important in the context here. Why? Because in both Genesis 4 and Hosea 2 the word is used in the context of a husband and wife.

What the use of that same word here in verse 8 means is that Israel did know God with the knowledge that a wife should have of her husband. And that knowledge between husband and wife includes academic knowledge, intimate knowledge, and experiential knowledge.

This lack of knowledge in verse 8 is a reminder that the marriage bond had been broken. It is a reminder of what God said back in verse 2 - “she is not my wife, and I am not her husband.”

What we are seeing here with the use of the word “know” in verse 8 is perhaps the central theme of the entire book of Hosea - spiritual adultery. That spiritual adultery was the reason why the marriage bond between God and Israel had been broken, and that spiritual adultery was the reason why God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute.

And the lessons about this word “know” and the warnings against spiritual adultery are not lessons and warnings only for ancient Israel. They are also lessons and warnings for us today.

1 Corinthians 6:15-17 - Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” **But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.**

Ephesians 5:29-32 - For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the

church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.**

Of course, Israel should have known that her blessings were from God, and Israel should have known that in every way that is encompassed by the meaning of the word “know” in verse 8.

Israel should have **academically** known that her blessings were from God. Why? Because the Scriptures told Israel her blessings were from God and the prophets told Israel that her blessings were from God.

Israel should have **intimately** known that her blessings were from God. Why? Because God had shown his love for Israel in countless ways as a husband shows his love for his wife. In fact, Israel’s then current existence despite her repeated rebellions was evidence of God’s love and providence toward Israel. Israel should have known that these blessings were from her husband.

Israel should have **experientially** known that her blessings were from God. Why? Because Israel had experienced the blessings of God over and over throughout her history. God had led Israel out of Egypt and given her a land of milk and honey. God had repeatedly saved Israel from her adversaries. Israel should have known from her own experience that these blessings were not from Baal but were from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Israel should have known these things, but Israel did not know these things. And that ignorance can be described only as a willful ignorance.

Isaiah 1:3 - The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but **Israel does not know**, my people do not understand.

Romans 1:28 - And even as they **did not like to retain God in their knowledge**, God gave them over to a reprobate mind...

And this willful ignorance led to ingratitude.

The people of God are a thankful people - how could it be otherwise when we think about all that God has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us?

Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him **graciously give us all things?**

Colossians 3:15 - And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. **And be thankful.**

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - **Give thanks in all circumstances;** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

And, as for knowing God, remember the beautiful prophesy of the church that we see in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31:34 - And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

In the church everyone knows God. Those outside the church do not know God, but those inside the church all know God, from the least to the greatest.

What was lacking in the kingdom of Israel is a defining characteristic of the kingdom of Christ - knowledge of God. Those in Christ know God; those not in Christ do not know God. Those in the church know God; those not in the church do not know God.

Galatians 4:8 - Formerly, **when you did not know God**, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that **you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God**, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

1 Thessalonians 4:5 - Not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles **who do not know God**.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 - In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on **those who do not know God** and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Titus 1:16 - They **profess to know God**, but they deny him by their works.

1 John 2:3-4 - And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says **“I know him”** but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 4:8 - Anyone who does not love **does not know God**, because God is love.

Let's keep all of this in mind as we continue through Hosea and as we encounter the many other uses of the word “know” in this book.

Hosea 2:9-10

9 Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. 10 Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

The sin in verse 8 is followed by punishment in verses 9-13.

We see several things going on with this punishment.

First, we see a refutation by God that Baal is the source of fertility.

The grain and the wine come from God, not from Baal. And whether the people have these blessings or do not have these blessings is up to God, not up to Baal.

That the grain is taken “in its time” and the wine “in its season” means that they are taken when they ripen, which points to a failure

of the harvest - the very thing that the people had turned to Baal to avoid.

This first aspect of the punishment reminds us of Elijah's announcement of the drought, which showed that God rather than Baal was the bringer of rain. Here we see that God rather than Baal is the bringer of the harvest.

But second, the punishment in these verses also points back to the marriage bond between God and Israel.

Now that that bond had been broken, God as a husband is retrieving his property from his wayward wife. God is taking back that which is rightfully his.

Verse 9 tells us that the wool and the flax were intended to cover the woman's nakedness, but now the wool and the flax have been taken away from her. As a result, as we see in verse 10, she is uncovered in the sight of her lovers.

We talked about verse 10 earlier when we looked at verse 3. As we said then, this public exposure most likely points to the exile that was coming for Israel because of her spiritual adultery. In the ancient world captives were often taken away naked, and ancient art work routinely depicted departing exiles as naked.

These lovers in verse 10 are the foreign nations in which Israel trusted and the foreign gods Israel worshipped, but I think the focus here is on the foreign nations. Assyria was one such nation, and it was Assyria that would soon lead Israel away naked in exile.

And who would be there to rescue Israel from that terrible fate? The end of verse 10 answers that question - **no one**. "No one shall rescue her out of my hand."

Before we leave these verses, let's look for a moment at the word "wine" that we see in verses 8-9.

There are 14 different words used in the Bible to denote "wine." The word used here is *tiyros* (from the word for expulsion) and refers to freshly squeezed out grape juice that has not fermented. And that word makes perfect sense from the context here - God takes this wine back "in its season," which means at the moment that it would have been harvested.

Why do I point this out? I point this out because it is wrong to assume that every use of the word “wine” in our English translations refers to intoxicating wine, and that warning applies to both the Old and the New Testaments. Whether or not the word “wine” in the Bible refers to alcoholic wine must be determined based on the Hebrew or Greek word that is used and based on the context in which that word appears.

And, to be very frank, we should avoid the *reckless* use of the Bible to justify the *reckless* use of alcohol!

Sometimes we hear an appeal to the Bible from those who seek to justify the use of recreational alcohol by a Christian, and very often those appeals are based entirely on our current understanding of the English word “wine” combined with unwarranted assumptions about what that word means in the Bible.

If we were to embark on that study, I think that what we might find is that the Bible never speaks with approval about the recreational use of intoxicating beverages. And I know that we would see that we need to be extremely careful before we ever suggest otherwise.

And that warning is especially important given the **tremendous evil** that the alcohol industry is inflicting on our world today and given the frequent commands in the Bible that Christians must always be **sober and watchful**.

But if anyone is looking for an example in the Bible where the word “wine” is used to refer to **fresh grape juice**, then you can look at verses 8-9. And there are many other such examples in the Bible.

Hosea 2:11

11 And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.

In verse 11, God says that he will put an end to the various religious celebrations that the people of Israel held each year.

Most likely these events were mixtures of various feasts and celebrations under the old law with various feasts and celebrations in honor of Baal. As we discussed earlier, the people were guilty of syncretism in their mixture of true and false religion.

The feasts and celebrations under the old law had been ordained by God so that the people could, with joy, show their love and gratitude to God.

Deuteronomy 26:11 - And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

But the people had rejected God, and they had forgotten what God had done for them. And while they continued to celebrate, they were now using those celebrations to thank and honor Baal.

Some commentators even suggest that the people had turned some of these feasts into the sexual orgies that were a part of the worship of the fertility god Baal.

As for the list of events in verse 11 (feasts, new moons, Sabbaths, and appointed feasts), that list reminds us of similar lists describing the true of worship of God.

2 Chronicles 2:4 - Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the LORD my God and dedicate it to him for the burning of incense of sweet spices before him, and for the regular arrangement of the showbread, and for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the **Sabbaths** and the **new moons** and the **appointed feasts** of the LORD our God, as ordained forever for Israel.

Ezra 3:4-5 - And they kept the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required, and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the **new moon** and at all the **appointed feasts** of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD.

But these Sabbaths and new moons and appointed feasts in verse 11 were no longer a part of the true worship of the one true God. Instead, these events were being offered as false worship of a false god.

And so God was going to put an end to it all.

The verb used here for “put an end to” is the same verb that was used in 1:4 to announce the end of the rule of the house of Israel - “I will **put an end to** the kingdom of the house of Israel.” And, likewise, when Assyria showed up, all of these celebrations would come to a complete end.

There is a lesson here for the people of God at any point in history. In Hosea’s day, the people had turned their back on God - but they had not turned their back on the rituals of God.

They were able to carry on with those outward expressions without realizing that God had rejected them and was very soon going to put an end to both them and their pretense of worship.

And the lesson for us?

John 4:24 - God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

In Hosea’s day, the people were going through the motions, but their hearts were directed to Baal. If I ever find myself just going through the motions with my hearts directed elsewhere, how am I any better than those ancient Israelites?

Matthew 15:8-9 - This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

As we read about Israel in the book of Hosea, we are seeing Israel at its lowest point. But we need to remember that Israel did not start out at its lowest point. Instead, Israel was once at its highest point. Israel had once been a part of a unified kingdom under King David and King Solomon.

But what happened? What happened was that Solomon died and Israel rebelled.

2 Chronicles 10:19 - So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

And step by step Israel moved further and further away from God until they eventually reached the point where we meet them in Hosea, at their lowest point and near the very end of their history.

And what is the lesson there for us? The lesson is that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

If we ever find ourselves a thousand miles away from God, we need to realize that once we were only a single step away from God. Let's resolve never to take that single step!

Hebrews 2:1 - Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we **drift away** from it.

2 John 1:9 - Everyone who **goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ**, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Let's keep our feet on our firm foundation and not wander even one step off the narrow path that leads to God.

Lesson 12

In verse 12, we are in the middle of a cycle that we are seeing for the second time in this second chapter. In verse 8, we saw the sin. In verses 9-13, we are seeing the punishment. And in verses 14-23, we will see the redemption.

Hosea 2:12

12 And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them.

Verse 12 is not promising just a temporary setback caused by drought or locusts; verse 12 is instead promising a complete catastrophe.

If the harvest of grain and grapes had been lost in a single year, the people could have hoped for a better harvest next year. But when the vines and the trees are destroyed, the hope for next year is also lost.

What we are seeing in verse 12 is a promise of a complete reversion of the land back to wilderness.

The vines are destroyed, the fig trees are destroyed, a forest appears in their place, and the wild beasts have free reign to eat whatever remains. For all of that to occur, either the people must no longer be present, or they must be too few in number to prevent the land from turning back into a wilderness.

This punishment is pointing to the deportation of the people that was about to occur after the Assyrian invasion. The people would very soon not be around to celebrate their feasts or to farm and cultivate their land.

Before we leave verse 12, we should pause and notice what the mother says here: “These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.”

She continues to believe that these gifts from God (the vines, the fig trees, the produce) were instead gifts from her lovers (her false gods and the foreign nations in which she trusted) - and she persists in that belief even when God shows up to take those gifts back.

What we see with this woman is complete spiritual blindness. And, as a result of that blindness, I think we are seeing something else from this woman - complete shock.

Remember from our historical overview that this drastic change in their situation was occurring after a long period of peace and prosperity. Everything would soon be falling apart, and when it came it would happen very quickly. The people would be shocked by the change in their situation.

I think we see that shock here in verse 12. These things are hers; she earned them. How can they be taken away? How can she not be secure? How can she not be right with God, and why can't she depend on all of the others gods she now worships?

Blindness and shock - those two things always go together.

We walk across a dark room secure in our belief that we know where we are going - until suddenly we walk into something that we cannot see and that we have forgotten was even there. And so our blindness turns to shock from something unexpected.

Matthew 15:13-14 - Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.

There is no condition so dangerous as spiritual blindness.

Yes, Covid is bad, RSV is bad, and the flu is bad. But there is no condition more dangerous than thinking I am right with God, when I am not.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to

keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

As we study this book of Hosea, let's keep in mind that we will never find a greater example of spiritual blindness than the blindness that had befallen the people of Israel at this point in their history. (The Pharisees may have been equally blind.)

They thought they were right with God. They were still going through all of the motions, and they were still enjoying the gifts of the land. They felt very secure.

But they were not right with God. They were about as far away from God as possible, and they were blind to that fact. And they were not secure; they were in great danger. Their judgment was near. They had deceived themselves.

Hosea 2:13

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

I think the ASV translation of this verse is better than the ESV.

Hosea 2:13 (ASV) - And I will visit upon her the days of the Baalim, unto which she burned incense, when she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith Jehovah.

If we were to paraphrase verse 13, it might be this: **“you want it, you got it!”**

Sometimes the worst punishment from God is when God gives us exactly what we want - and here what the people wanted was Baal.

But would Baal save them when the Assyrians showed up? Would Baal replace the gifts that God was now taking back?

These “days of the Baals” in verse 13 would be the days that Israel was apparently wanting - the days when Israel would turn to Baal

instead of to God. The days when Israel would worship Baal. The days when Israel would adorn herself for Baal.

Not the day of the Lord, but the day of Baal - the day when Baal would be in charge of everything. And how would that work out? How **did** that work out?

As for the plural “Baals” or “Baalim” in verse 13, that likely refers either to various false gods that were all called Baal or to various shrines at which Baal was worshipped. We saw various “Baals” on the handout from Lesson 10.

The word “forgot” in verse 13 is interesting. It does not mean that the people forgot God in the sense that they no longer knew who God was. Instead, what it means is that they forgot God in the sense that they did not ever think about God or about what God wanted them to do.

They forgot God in the sense that God did not shape their thoughts or their actions. Israel was not focused on God but instead was focused on her lovers (false gods and foreign nations). God was overlooked and ignored. That is what it means when verse 13 says that they **forgot** God.

Jesus warned us about that same kind of forgetfulness.

Mark 4:18-19 - And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Such people know about God intellectually, but God does not shape their thoughts or their actions in any way. They would live no differently than if they had never heard anything about God. They instead are guided entirely by “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things.”

Hosea 2:14-15

14 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I

will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

If we were to make a list of the most jarring and unexpected words in the Bible, the word “therefore” in Hosea 2:14 would be pretty high up on that list. Here is how one commentary describes its appearance in verse 14:

When Hosea says “Therefore” after what he had said in the previous verse, we can no longer harbor doubts that he is deliberately dealing in non sequiturs.

In effect, what God is saying is this: **“You have done all of these horrible things to me, and so therefore I will do all of these wonderful things for you.”**

Who else but God would ever say such a thing? But, of course, God did much more than just **say** such a thing - God **DID** such a thing!

Romans 5:8 - But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And Hosea 2:14 is even more shocking than Romans 5:8. Why? Because of that word “therefore.” Not “you have done horrible things to me, **but** I will do wonderful things for you.” But “you have done horrible things to me, **therefore** I will do wonderful things for you.”

Hosea 2:14-15 is not at all what we would expect to see here. The word “therefore” should introduce the logical consequence of what we just saw - the logical consequence of Israel rejecting God in favor of Baal. But that is not what we see here. Verses 14-15 are not the logical consequence of verses 8-13, at least not from a human perspective.

These verses are not showing us the wisdom of this world. Instead, what we see here is the wisdom from above. What we see here is the opposite of what we would expect to see. What we see here is a door of hope.

What is the explanation for such a thing? Romans 5:8 answers that question: “But **God shows his love for us** in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

The only possible explanation for the word “therefore” in Hosea 2:14 is also the only possible explanation for the cross of Christ - they are both explained only by the love of God. And that love cannot be explained by the wisdom of man.

And what is the wonderful thing that God is planning for Israel?

God will allure Israel and speak tenderly to her. And God will bring her into the wilderness. Why the wilderness? That sounds a bit like a punishment, but it is not.

There are several things going on with that word “wilderness” in verse 14.

First, that wilderness shows us a restoration.

God had removed the vineyards to create that wilderness in verse 12, and now in verse 15 God gives her back those vineyards in the wilderness. What that means is that the land prior to that wilderness is being restored. God is making all things new.

Second, the wilderness also shows us Israel’s trust in God.

She followed God into that wilderness trusting that God would protect her there. Jeremiah would later use similar language in his opening words to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 2:2 - Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, **how you followed me in the wilderness**, in a land not sown.

Third, the wilderness points to a restoration of the marriage bond.

Israel would follow God, her husband, anywhere - even into the wilderness. We see that also in the same verse from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 2:2 - Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, “I remember the devotion of your youth, **your love as a bride**, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

And fourth, the wilderness reminds us of another wilderness into which God led and protected his people.

Ezekiel 20:10 - So I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

And we see a reference to that same event here at the end of verse 14 - “And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.”

God would protect Israel as he had protected them during the Exodus, and the people would answer God as they had answered God during the Exodus.

Here at the end of Israel’s history, God is looking back to the days of Israel’s youth. And God is promising that things would be like that once again. **But when?**

To help us answer that question, we should note that Hosea 2:14-15 reminds us immediately of a great prophecy from Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31:1-5 - “At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.” Thus says the LORD: “**The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;** when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. **I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.** Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. **Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria;** the planters shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit.

And when would that prophecy come to pass? Keep reading in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 - “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, **when I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after

those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This wonderful thing that God had in store for Israel here in verses 14-15 is the same wonderful thing that God had in store for everyone - the gospel of Christ - the new covenant of his blood.

And that is not a wonderful blessing for Israel at the end of all time - that is a wonderful blessing for Israel that appeared in the first century when Jesus came and gave his life for us all - both Jew and Gentile. “The grace of God **has appeared**, bringing salvation for **all people**.” (Titus 2:11) And that wonderful blessing remains available for all to this very day.

There is a beautiful promise in verse 15 - I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. What does that mean?

The Valley of Achor is one of the rugged narrow entrances into the central hill country from the Jordan Valley. It was in that valley where Achan was executed in Joshua 7, after which that valley then became a reminder of the trouble that comes from being disobedient to God. In fact, the Hebrew word “Achor” means “trouble.”

Now that valley of trouble is reversed so that it instead becomes a door of hope! **And we should thank God every day that he is still turning the Valley of Trouble into the Door of Hope!**

Psalm 23:4 - Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

And what is that door of hope in verse 15? We should ask instead **who** is that door of hope.

John 10:7-9 - So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door of the sheep**. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **I am the door**. If anyone enters by me, **he will be saved** and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jesus is our door, and Jesus is our hope.

Ephesians 2:12 - Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, **having no hope** and without God in the world.

1 Peter 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again **to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

So what is the hope in verse 15? If there can be no hope apart from Christ, then that door of hope in verse 15 must be Christ.

Hosea keeps giving the people bad news and good news. And the bad news is always the same - that Israel would soon be carried off by the Assyrians. But the good news is also always the same - that Israel (along with everyone else in the world) would some day find hope and reconciliation in the gospel of Christ. Punishment would be followed by redemption.

Hosea 2:16-17

16 “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.

Verse 16 begins with a phrase that is crucial in understanding this prophecy - “in that day.” We will see the same thing in verse 18 - “on that day.” And we will see it in verse 21 - “in that day.” Whenever you see those phrases in the Bible, circle them! They are always crucial.

Why are those three short phrases so important? Because they give us the time frame of the prophecy.

We will have very little hope of understanding any prophecy in the Bible if that prophecy includes a time frame and we ignore that time frame.

And most of the prophecies in the Bible include a time frame.

You may have heard of Nostradamus, the famous mystic who wrote many prophecies, some of which many people think have come true. What was his secret? His secret was that he wrote vague prophecies with no time frames. So when Nostradamus wrote that a king and his brother would be struck down, people can slide that prophecy along the timeline of history until they get to JFK and RFK in the sixties!

That is not how the prophecies in the Bible work. When the Bible tells us that something will happen, it almost always tells us **when** it will happen, or at least it gives us many other things that will happen at the same time so that we can easily determine when it will happen.

If Nostradamus had told us in the 1500's that a king and his brother would be struck down in 1963 and 1968 - or that a king and his brother would be struck down a few years before mankind walked on the moon - then I would be impressed.

So once again - we will have very little hope of understanding any prophecy in the Bible if that prophecy includes a time frame and we ignore that time frame.

But we would never do that, right? Well, I hope not, but experience tells me that we might sometimes do that.

The book of Revelation, for example, begins with a time frame in the very first verse! "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants **the things that must soon take place.**"

Oh, but that doesn't really mean that! Really? Then why does the book repeat that same time frame two verses later in 1:3? And why does the book repeat the same time frame twice at the end of the book in 22:6 and 22:10? And in the middle of the book?

The next time someone brags to you that they take every verse of Revelation literally - ask them if that applies to the very first verse! I suspect it does not!

So again - we will have very little hope of understanding any prophecy in the Bible if that prophecy includes a time frame and we ignore that time frame.

Let's not make that mistake here in Hosea 2 (or anywhere!).

What is the "day" in verse 16?

“In that day” refers to whatever day we were seeing in the prior verse. Hosea just told us something would happen, and here in verse 16 he tells us that something else will happen “in that day.” That is, the events in verses 15 and 16 will happen at the same time.

So what did we just read about in verse 15? The door of hope. We just read about a day when the valley of trouble would become a door of hope. And again, that promise was pointing to the gospel of Christ that was first proclaimed in the first century. Jesus is the door of hope who replaces the valley of trouble.

So whatever we are about to see here in verse 16 was going to happen at the same time as when Jesus came and became our door of hope through his perfect sacrifice and his wonderful gospel.

Oh, but, no - that can't be right - these promises to Israel are all about the end of the world when the Jews will all gather in Palestine to fight the Antichrist, and on, and on, and on.

Really? If so, then that would mean that we do not yet have our door of hope because verses 15 and 16 occur in the same day. That would mean that the new covenant we read about in Jeremiah 31 is not here yet. That would mean that the great blessing for the entire world - both Jew and Gentile - has not yet come.

Now do we see why the time frame is so important? It keeps us from making the crucial mistake of suddenly jumping to the end of the world each time we have trouble interpreting a prophecy in the Bible. Yes, there are prophecies about the end of the world in the Bible. But, no, not every prophecy in the Bible is about the end of the world!

So what does verse 16 tell us will happen in that day? God says to them, “You will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’”

Now that we have taken our deep dive into the history of Baal, we are in a perfect position to catch the little play on words that we find here in verse 16.

Remember that the Hebrew word “Baal” means lord or master, and sometimes it means husband - as it does, for example, in Proverbs 12.

Proverbs 12:4 - A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband [to her Baal]...

Here in verse 16 there are two different Hebrew words that can each mean “husband.” The second such word is “Baal,” and the first such word is “Ish” (which more broadly just means a man, but is sometimes used more narrowly to mean a husband).

So what is the word play? Verse 16 says, “You will call me '**My Husband**,' and no longer will you call me '**My Husband!**'”

But, of course, the word that God chose for that second occurrence of “Husband” had taken on a very different meaning by this time. The people were now looking to the false god Baal as their lord, as their master, and as their husband.

One commentary made a very interesting point about the use of the word Baal here. As we have said, that word just means lord or master, and so in that sense it could be applied to God (as it is in fact used that way in the Bible a few times). Here is what that commentary says on this subject:

One could call God “my Baal” and justify it on the grounds that the term means no more than “my lord.” But since the word was also the name of the Canaanite deity, the devotees of Baal could make use of this semantic overlap to smuggle their cult into the worship of God.

That commentary struck a chord with me. I suspect many of us have known or at least heard about preachers or teachers in the church who, it seems, were intentionally trying to deceive their listeners. Thankfully, I think such people are rare in the church, but they do exist, and we also see such people around in the New Testament.

2 Corinthians 2:17 - For we are not, like so many, **peddlers of God's word**, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

In my experience, such people all have at least one thing in common - **they are all able to teach things with just enough ambiguity that what they say can mean one thing to one group of people while meaning a completely different thing at the same time to a different group of people.**

For example, I knew a preacher who did not believe in the essentiality of baptism, so in his invitations he would say, "You should be baptized because in the first century church there were no unbaptized Christians." You can interpret that phrase in a variety of different ways - which is what he was counting on!

That is a rare talent - fortunately! And I think we can see how that rare talent could have been used to subtly introduce the worship of the false god Baal into the worship of the one true God.

Lesson 13

Hosea 2:16-17 (Continued)

16 “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.

The people were now looking to the false god Baal as their lord, as their master, and as their husband. And the promise from God in verse 16 is that that sad situation would not last forever. The day was coming when the people would once again recognize God as their true Lord, their true Master, and their true Husband.

And **when** would this happen? Today, we can ask when **did** this happen. And we have already answered that question. We answered it when we looked at the word “know” in verse 8. And we found the answer in Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31:34 - And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.** For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Jeremiah 31 is a prophecy about the church under the new covenant. It is in the church, and only in the church, where everyone knows the Lord. No one in the church looks to Baal, but instead all in the church look only to God.

And when did that happen? That happened in Acts 2 on the day when the gospel was proclaimed and the church was established. And, of course, it still happens today when people obey the gospel of Christ and are added by God to the church of Christ.

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

And again, that is just another way of expressing the great prophecy of Jeremiah 31:34 - “for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

The people of Hosea’s day very often had the names of their false gods in their mouths, but a day was coming when that would no longer be true. A day was coming when **all** of God’s people - from the least to the greatest - would have only the name of God in their mouth.

And that day came when the church was established - and everyone added by God to the church knows God and remembers no false gods. We see the name of God in the great proclamation of the gospel in Acts 2.

Acts 2:38 - And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you **in the name of Jesus Christ** for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

All in the church - from the least to the greatest - know God. We do not have the names of the Baals in our mouths.

Connections?

One more lesson before we leave verses 16-17 - and it a lesson about something that might seem a bit out of place here.

Some of you may remember a TV series from the 1970’s called “Connections.” In that series, a British science historian named James Burke would show connections between things that most people would have never thought were connected in any way. For example, in one episode he showed a connection between Napoleon’s army and the Saturn V rocket!

I have always thought that a similar TV series or book about the Bible would be fascinating. There are many **seemingly** surprising connections in the Bible. Why do I say seemingly? Because those connections should not surprise us at all!

Yes, the Bible was penned by many people over thousands of years, but those words were breathed out by a single author. And so we should not be surprised at all when we find **seemingly** unexpected connections between distant books in the Bible.

As an example, I think we can find an interesting connection between Hosea 2 and a topic that may seem out of place in Hosea - **infant baptism**.

When H.L. Mencken, an avowed atheist, was once asked if he believed in infant baptism, he replied “Believe in it? I’ve seen it done!”

But, of course, the question is whether Mencken had actually seen the **baptism** of an infant, or had instead just seen the **bath** of an infant. And the Bible tells us that all Mencken could have possibly seen is the latter.

It is impossible to baptize an infant. Why? Because baptism must be done in the name of Jesus Christ - which means under the authority of Christ and with the approval of Christ so that we are redeemed by Christ and added to the body of Christ. And Romans 6:4 tells us that baptism is a burial. We are buried spiritually dead, and we are raised spiritually alive.

No infant can ever experience a baptism for the simple reason that no infant is spiritually dead. In fact, Jesus tells us in Mark 10:15 that we need to become like a little child before we can enter the kingdom. And that is what we become when we experience a new birth at our baptism (2 Corinthians 5:17).

So what does Hosea have to teach us about infant baptism? Two things, perhaps.

First, verse 15 tells us that the people would become “as in the days of her youth.” I think that phrase in Hosea is a prophecy or a promise or a pre-figuring that in this new kingdom, we would become like a little child as Jesus told us in Mark 10:15.

And, of course, a little child does not need to become like a little child for the simple reason that a little child is already a little child! Infants don’t need to be saved because infants are not lost! Infants are not **saved**. Infants are **safe**. Infants are sinless.

And for those in the religious world today who would argue that infants are in danger because they have inherited the sin of Adam, I will just let the Apostle Paul clear up that misconception:

Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **because all sinned**.

Death did not spread to all men because Adam sinned, but rather death spread to all men because all men sinned. But infants have not sinned, and so death has not spread to them. Sin is not inherited (Ezekiel 18:20). I think Hosea 2:15 is a reminder to us of that fact.

But second, verse 16 is also a reminder of the great prophecy from Jeremiah 31:34 that everyone in this new kingdom would know the Lord. There is a knowledge requirement in this kingdom. And that is not something we learn from Hosea only here in verse 16. As we have already seen, knowledge is an important theme in Hosea.

One became a member of the ancient kingdom of Israel by being **physically** born into it. And although such a person may have learned about God later in their life as he grew up, that person knew nothing about God at his birth. There is no knowledge requirement to being physically born!

As for the church, one becomes a member of that kingdom by being **spiritually** born into it. That spiritual birth is available only to those who have heard the gospel and learned about God and what God requires of them (as those who heard Peter in Acts 2 knew when they asked their question in Acts 2:37).

What that means is that those in the church ALL know God from the moment of their spiritual birth. That can never be true of an infant. An infant cannot be baptized. It is impossible.

The phrase “infant baptism” belongs on the list of oxymorons along with jumbo shrimp, civil war, plastic glass, and gay marriage. Those things just don’t go together. It is impossible to baptize an infant, and we don’t even need to leave Hosea 2 to see that!

Hosea 2:18-23

18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD. 21 “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, 23 and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'”

This section of Hosea in verses 16-23 is one of the great prophecies of the church that we find in the Old Testament. (Many others are shown on the handout for Lesson 13.)

How do we know that this is a prophesy about the church? We know it because of the evidence. Let's look at that evidence now.

First, the time frame is evidence that we are looking at the church in these verses.

Verse 16 begins with the phrase “in that day.” In verse 18, we see the phrase “on that day.” And in verse 21 we again see the phrase “in that day.”

What day is that day? We looked at that question last week, and we saw that it points to the coming of Christ to give himself for the world as a perfect sacrifice and to proclaim his wonderful gospel.

That time frame is the same time as Acts 2, where the church, the promised eternal kingdom of Christ, was established.

We are not looking at the end of the world here, and we are not looking at the near future of Israel in Hosea's day. Instead, the wonderful promises in Hosea are promises of Christ and the church of Christ.

A big piece of evidence that the prophecies in these verses are directed to the church is that the time frame for the fulfillment of these prophecies is the same as the time frame in which the church was established.

A second piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that verses 16-17 and the second half of verse 20 describe a situation in which all of God's people would know God. That is the same situation that we find in the church.

We talked about this evidence last week and earlier today.

Hosea is describing a time in which all the people of God would know God. That was certainly not true about the people of Israel. They did not know God (verse 8), and they would be destroyed by their lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

One of the great prophecies of the church is that those in the church - all of those in the church - would know God. And we see that great prophecy several times in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 11:9 - They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; **for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.**

Jeremiah 31:34 - And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' **for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,** declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Joel 3:17 - **So you shall know that I am the LORD your God,** who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

Zechariah 2:11 - And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and **you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.**

And we know that prophecy is fulfilled in the church.

Galatians 4:8 - Formerly, **when you did not know God**, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that **you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God**, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

1 Thessalonians 4:5 - Not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles **who do not know God**.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 - In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on **those who do not know God** and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Titus 1:16 - They **profess to know God**, but they deny him by their works.

1 John 2:3-4 - And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says **“I know him”** but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

A third piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that the first half of verse 18 describes a new covenant. And a related fourth piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that the second half of verse 18 describes a time of peace and safety.

We will see in a moment why we are considering these two pieces of evidence together.

“I will make for them a covenant on that day.” That phrase from verse 18 is clearly describing a new covenant that was established in the first century. We know it is a new covenant because God says, “I will make” it. And we know it was made in the first century because (as we have seen) the phrase “that day” is referring to the first century.

That much is clear. But after that, things become a bit less clear!

“And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.”

The new covenant we see here in verse 18 is a new covenant that God makes for his people with the beasts, the birds, and the insects! What does that mean?

For help with that question, let's look at another great prophecy about the church found in Isaiah 11:6-9.

But before we read verses 6-9 from Isaiah 11, let's read verses 1-5 of Isaiah 11 so that we can know with certainty the time frame of verses 6-9.

Isaiah 11:1-5 - There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Those verses give us the time frame for the prophecy in Isaiah 11, and that time frame is when Jesus came to the earth in the first century. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse." (Jesse was the father of King David.)

So now let's read the next part of that prophecy from Isaiah 11.

Isaiah 11:6-9 - The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

That prophecy is describing a time of peace and security. How was that fulfilled when Jesus came in the first century?

The answer is that it was fulfilled in the church. The head of the church is the prince of peace, and those in the church are at peace with God and at peace with each other. Peace between Jew and Gentile had long been a promise from God, and that promise was and is fulfilled in the church. We are at war (2 Corinthians 10:4, 1 Timothy 1:18), but we are not at war with each other or with God.

Ephesians 2:13-17 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our **peace**, who has made us both one and has **broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making **peace**, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby **killing the hostility**. And he came and preached **peace** to you who were far off and **peace** to those who were near.

And how is that peace described by Isaiah? In several ways.

In Isaiah 2:4, that peace is described as a time when “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” (And yes, that phrase appears in front of the UN building, and yes, that phrase refers to peace between Jew and Gentile, and, yes, the irony in that is lost on the UN!)

In Isaiah 11:6-9 (which we just read), Isaiah described that peace using the animal kingdom (just like we see here in verse 18) - the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, the cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

So, now, what do we have in verse 18? We have a new covenant, we have a first century time frame, we have an end of hostility, and we have peace and safety.

So how was all of that fulfilled? It was all fulfilled in the church. What else but the church involves a new covenant, a first century time frame, an end of hostility, and peace and safety?

Yes, it is odd to think of the new covenant as being made by God for us “with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.” But is that description any more odd than the description in Isaiah 11? “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat”?

Both Isaiah 11 and Hosea 2 are telling us the same thing about the new covenant - it is a covenant of peace, it is a covenant of reconciliation, it is a covenant of blood. It brings an end to the hostility.

Hebrews 13:20-21 - Now may **the God of peace** who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, **by the blood of the eternal covenant**, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Colossians 1:19-23 - For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of his cross**. And you, who once were alienated and **hostile** in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now **reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, **which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven**, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

I know we have all heard the phrase “church fight,” and I suspect that a few of us have been involved in one. There is nothing more sad than a church fight! Those two words do not go together at all! Jesus shed his blood to make peace in his church! That is what we just read in Colossians 1:20 - “making peace by the blood of his cross.” Our peace came with a price!

And what happens when there is peace in the church? What happens when we are not fighting among ourselves? Church growth is what happens.

Acts 9:31 - So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had **peace** and was being **built up**. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, **it multiplied**.

Our view of the first half of verse 18 is confirmed by the second half of verse 18 - "And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety." And that is our fourth piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church.

As we have just seen, Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 11 describe the church as a place of peace, and Ephesians 2 confirms that the church is a place of peace. And Hosea 2:18 is describing the church the same way.

A fifth piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that verses 19-20 describe an eternal betrothal.

We have already seen in Hosea how the marriage bond between God and Israel had been broken. We saw it earlier in this same chapter - "for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (verse 2).

But later in this same chapter we have the great promise in verse 19 - "I will betroth you to me forever."

And, again, our time frame for the fulfillment of that great promise is the first century. How did that promise come to pass in the first century?

Ephesians 5:23-32 - For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and

hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Revelation 21:2 - And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, **prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**

Revelation 21:9 - And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, **I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.**

That is how the New Testament describes the church. And what does God say in Hosea? He uses the same language.

Hosea 2:19-20 - And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

A sixth piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that verse 21 describes a situation in which God will do whatever is required to care for his people, provide for his people, and meet every need of his people.

Here is what we read in verses 21-22 (this time from the KJV):

And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

*As an aside, note the difference between the KJV translation of verses 21-22 that we just read and the ESV that we read earlier. In the KJV, God says, “I will **hear**,” while in the ESV translation God says, “I will **answer**.” Why the difference? The Hebrew word means to pay attention to something (i.e., listen) and, by implication, to respond. Very often in the KJV it is translated “answered,” but sometimes the same word is translated “hear” as in Psalm 4:1 - “Hear me when I call.” (The ESV translates Psalm 4:1 as “Answer me when I call.”)*

Back to verses 21-22. What do they mean?

First, note the time frame in verse 21 - “in that day.” That is the same day we have been seeing throughout this prophecy. It is the first century when Christ came to die for us, to proclaim his gospel, and to establish his eternal kingdom.

Second, we should note the cosmic terms with which this deliverance is described. God hears the heavens, the heavens hear the earth, and the earth hears the corn, the wine, and the oil. As one commentary says, “God in effect declares that he will move the whole universe to bring this about.”

What is the message in this promise? The message here is that in the first century God will move heaven and earth to bless his people in every way possible.

Is that true of the church? Yes!

Acts 2:19-20 - And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

And when was that “great and magnificent day”? Peter answered that question before he quoted that verse from Joel.

Acts 2:16 - But **this** is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.

This is that! The day when Peter quotes that verse in Acts 2 was “the great and magnificent day” of Joel 2:31! It is the same day that we are reading about here in Hosea 2. But did God really move heaven and earth to bless his church? Yes, he did. We just saw that in Acts 2:19-20, but we also see it elsewhere.

Ephesians 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings in heavenly places** in Christ.

What about that last phrase - “and they shall hear Jezreel”? What does that mean?

Jezreel, as we recall, is the name of Hosea’s first child, whom we met back in Hosea 1:4.

Initially, his name was meant to indicate bloodshed, but in Hosea 1:11 we saw that his name was also meant to indicate blessing. In Hebrew, Jezreel can mean either “God scatters” or “God sows.” The scattering makes us think of bloodshed by the Assyrians, but the sowing makes us think of blessings from God.

It is in that latter sense that the name Jezreel is used here in verse 21 - they shall hear Jezreel; they shall hear that God is sowing; they shall hear of blessings.

And, of course, that is true of the church. No one has received or could ever receive more blessings from God than those of us in the church have received.

A seventh piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that verse 23 describes something created by God - not by man.

Verse 23 begins with the phrase, “and **I will sow her** unto me in the earth.”

At the end of verse 22 we saw that God sows, and here in the next verse we see that God sows people. What does it mean that God sows or plants people?

I think it is a reminder that the church was planted by God!

Matthew 15:13 - Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Jesus built the church (Matthew 16:18). The church is not man-made (Daniel 2:45). That is why it is described as the church **of Christ**.

And what will happen to man-made churches? Let’s read that last verse again!

Matthew 15:13 - Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be **rooted up**.

There is only one eternal kingdom, and that one eternal kingdom was planted by God. And that one eternal kingdom is the one body, which is the one church.

An eighth piece of evidence that shows we are looking at the church here is that both Peter and Paul tell us that the promise in verse 23 is fulfilled in the church.

At the end of verse 23, we read:

And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

We saw something very similar back in Hosea 1.

Hosea 1:10 - Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

These promises are the same - the sad situation of Israel in Hosea's day would not last forever. A day would come, God says, when *Not Loved* would be loved and *Not Mine* would be mine. Everything would be turned around. The parental bond that had been broken would be restored.

And when did this happen?

Although I think we could answer that question even without a time frame, we are given a time frame. We are still in that same day we have been in all along in these verses - we are in the first century when Jesus came and gave us his wonderful gospel.

This great promise is fulfilled in the church. But don't take my word for it. Listen to Paul and Peter as they point back to the prophecy in Hosea 1 and Hosea 2 and tell us that that it was fulfilled in the church.

Romans 9:22-26 - What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory — even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? **As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the very place where it was**

said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'”

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

For at least those eighth reasons, we know that Hosea 2:16-23 is a great prophecy about the church.

Lesson 14

Hosea 3:1

1 And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”

Verse 1 drags Hosea’s readers back to their present sinful reality after the brief tantalizing look at their future that we saw at the end of chapter 2.

If we are looking for a key word in verse 1, we don’t have to look very hard. The word “love” appears four times in that one verse!

But, as we also use the word “love” today, the word “love” is used in various ways here in verse 1. It is used for the love of God for Israel, the love Hosea was to have for this unnamed woman, the love she has received from her lover, and the love of Israel for raisin cakes.

There is a lot going on in this first verse! Let’s move back a bit and look at the entire third chapter before we dive into the first verse.

Chapter 3 is a very short chapter, and it has a simple structure. God issues a command to Hosea in verse 1, Hosea carries out that command in verses 2-3, and God explains the reason for the command in verses 4-5.

This structure is the same structure we saw in chapters 1 and 2. God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer; Hosea did that, with Gomer having three children; and God then explained the significance of those events to what was going on in Israel.

A big difference between the events in chapters 1-2 and chapter 3 is that here in chapter 3 no children are born or even mentioned. Also, the woman in chapter 3 is not named, unlike with Gomer in chapter 1.

Another difference is that chapter 1 described the events in the **third** person (“the LORD said **to Hosea**” in Hosea 1:2) while here the events are described in the **first** person (“And the LORD said **to me**” in Hosea 3:1).

Some commentaries explain this difference by arguing that chapter 3 is a later addition created by a different author, but I think that conclusion is baseless.

If we have trouble understanding something about the text of Hosea, then that just means we need to do some more work and dig a little deeper. It is both misguided and lazy to instead conclude that there must be something wrong with the text. **Maybe the problem is with me if I can't understand the text!** But, of course, no liberal commentator would ever reach that conclusion!

When we dig a little deeper, what we find is that this back and forth between the first person and the third person does not end in chapter 3. Instead, we see the same back and forth later in the book.

Hosea 8:2 - **To me** they cry, “My God, we — Israel — know you.”

Hosea 9:17 - My God will reject them because they have not listened **to him**; they shall be wanderers among the nations.

Let's not reach our final conclusion on this question yet, but I think what we may find is that this back and forth between first and third person is part of the structure of this book of Hosea.

This back and forth in the point of view is part of the message that God wants us to understand. I think we may find that it is based on the events that Hosea has experienced with Gomer that mirror what God has experienced with Israel.

Hosea has, in effect, through his own experiences earned the right to speak for God. And so perhaps we see that fact even in the grammar that is used - sometimes God speaks for himself, and sometimes Hosea speaks for God.

So, what is going on in chapter 3? Even though it is a short chapter, it is a hotly debated chapter in Hosea circles!

The commentaries differ greatly in their interpretation of Chapter 3. There are two primary questions:

- (1) Is this woman in verse 1 Gomer or another woman?
- (2) If the woman is Gomer, then is this event in verse 1 just a retelling of the event we already saw in chapter 1, or is this a different event?

By the way, if you ever want to show someone why the NIV is a very poor translation, verse 1 is a good place to go. Here is how the NIV translates the verse.

Hosea 3:1 - The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your **wife** again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.”

But if that is really what the verse says, then why are we asking whether the woman in verse 1 is Gomer? Didn't the NIV just tell us the woman in Gomer?

Yes, that is what the NIV just told us, but no, that is not what the Bible just told us!

When the NIV inserts the word “wife” into verse 1, the NIV is acting like a poor commentary rather than like a poor translation! Here are some actual translations of verse 1.

ESV - And the LORD said to me, “Go again, **love a woman** who is loved by another man and is an adulteress.”

KJV - Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, **love a woman** beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress.

ASV - And Jehovah said unto me, Go again, **love a woman** beloved of her friend, and an adulteress.

Is that woman Gomer or not? The text of verse 1 is ambiguous on that point, and a good translation of Hebrew into English should carry that ambiguity in the Hebrew over into the same ambiguity in the English. The NIV does not do that, which is why the NIV is both a poor translation and a dangerous translation.

If someone reads the original Hebrew text and has some questions about what he just read, then that person reading an English translation should have exactly the same set of questions. That is the hallmark of a good translation.

And, yes, no translation is perfect, but some are much better than others. And while no translation is perfect **in its entirety**, it is possible to perfectly translate a verse in the Bible.

How do I know that? Because most of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint - a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. And so the Holy Spirit has confirmed for us that those translations are perfect translations.

But, with all of that said, it is likely that the NIV chose correctly when it removed the ambiguity in the Hebrew by inserting the more specific English word “wife” in place of the less specific Hebrew word for “woman.” But we need to keep in mind that the NIV is acting as a commentary in making that choice and not as the translation it purports to be.

Why is the woman in verse 1 not named? The most likely reason she is not named is because we already know who she is - she is Gomer. If, instead, she is someone else, then we would need to explain why she is not named even though Gomer was named.

Even more persuasive is the fact that she is called an “adulteress” in verse 1. That means she has a husband, but she is faithless to that husband.

If this woman was the husband of someone other than Hosea, then why would God command Hosea to go and love her? Commanding Hosea to show his love to the adulterous wife of another man would come very close to commanding that Hosea commit adultery himself! The command in verse 1 makes sense only if the woman in adultery is Hosea’s own wife.

And, if this woman is Gomer, then we should note that, like the beginning of chapter 1, the focus at the beginning of chapter 3 is on Gomer the person rather than on Israel the people (which is the focus in chapter 2). That is a similarity between chapters 1 and 3.

But we should still pause a moment to consider why verse 1 does not name Gomer? Why the ambiguity? Why does verse 1 refer to Gomer in anonymous terms?

I think what we are seeing with Gomer is the same thing we have already seen with Israel. Gomer has lost her identity as the wife of Hosea just as Israel has lost its identity as the people of God. Remember Hosea 2:2 - “for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband.”

So, here are our two questions again.

- (1) Is this woman in verse 1 Gomer or another woman?
- (2) If the woman is Gomer, then is this event in verse 1 just a retelling of the event in chapter 1, or is it a different event?

And I think we have now answered the first question - this woman is Gomer. But what about the second question?

There is a word in verse 1 that helps us here - the word “again.”

As for what is happening *again*, grammatically the word “again” can modify the verb that precedes it (*go* again) or the verb that follows it (*love* again). If it is the latter, then we have confirmation that this woman is Gomer - someone that Hosea can love *again*.

But either way, that word “again” in verse 1 puts us on a timeline and places verse 1 as a later event in a sequence of events. It tells us that something is happening again - either God is telling Hosea to go for a second time, or God is telling Hosea to love Gomer for a second time.

And I think the commands themselves tell us that this command in chapter 3 is a different and later command than the one we saw in chapter 1.

Hosea 1:2 - When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, **take to yourself a wife** of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”

Hosea 3:1 - And the LORD said to me, “Go again, **love a woman** who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”

In Chapter 1, Hosea was commanded to marry an immoral woman and to have children. Here in Chapter 3 we see neither of those commands. Instead, Hosea is commanded to love an adulteress woman. What that tells us is that the woman in Chapter 3 is already married - an unmarried woman can be promiscuous, but only a married woman can be an adulteress. We are seeing two different commands.

So where are we on our second question? I think we can conclude that the events in chapter 3 are subsequent to the events in chapter 1 given that no marriage had yet occurred when the command in chapter 1 was given.

But now we have another question - how can Hosea be commanded to love this woman? Can God command that Hosea have a certain emotion?

I think the next phrase answers that question: “even as the LORD loves the children of Israel.” This commanded love by Hosea is to mirror the love that God has for Israel - and that love had been shown over and over by what God had done for Israel rather than by how God may have felt about Israel.

Hosea was to take this woman back and restore their prior relationship. What we see in that command to love is redemption. What we see in that command to love is the same sort of love that we see in John 3:16.

Now let’s see if we can look between the lines a bit and figure out what likely happened here. Hosea married Gomer in chapter 1, but Gomer appears to have left Hosea as of the beginning of chapter 3. What happened?

One thing we know is that Gomer has become an adulteress, which means that she has been unfaithful to Hosea.

The penalty for adultery was death, but that judgment was not inevitable. Her husband could show her mercy as Hosea is commanded to do here. Perhaps, as some commentaries suggest, that command from God is a foretaste of the interplay between grace and the law that we see in the gospel.

As for the details of what happened, we don’t know because we aren’t told. Some surmise that this event may have occurred prior to the birth of Gomer’s third child, which could explain why he was named “Not Mine.” But we don’t know for sure when it happened.

Why does the end of verse 1 mention raisin cakes? Why is God concerned that the people are enjoying raisin cakes?

I think we can safely conclude that God's grief over Israel has nothing to do with their choice of dessert. So what is going on here?

The eating of raisin cakes was not in and of itself evil, even when eaten as part of a religious ceremony.

2 Samuel 6:18-19 - And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, **and a cake of raisins** to each one. Then all the people departed, each to his house.

Raisins were, for the Israelites, a high energy food that was consumed by those who were faint with hunger.

1 Samuel 30:11-12 - They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and **two clusters of raisins**. And when he had eaten, **his spirit revived**, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.

It is possible that raisin cakes were thought to have an aphrodisiac quality.

Song of Solomon 2:5 - Sustain me with **raisins**; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love.

From these examples, it is most likely that these raisin cakes were used as part of the pagan worship of the "other gods" mentioned in verse 1. These cakes may have been part of ecstatic or wild celebrations, and they may have played a role in the promiscuity of the Baal fertility cult.

We have another issue to deal with in verse 1, and that issue involves a command in the old law.

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 - When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, **then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD.** And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Here is how one commentary describes the issue:

Although probably not technically in violation of this law, because it does not seem that Gomer 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?

What Hosea was doing was obeying the command of God. God commanded that Hosea take Gomer back despite what she had done. Yes, Gomer had been with another man and likely other men. Yes, she had been defiled. But Hosea took her back anyway.

Was that a **violation** of the law? Was that an **abolition** of the law? No, that was **fulfillment** of the law!

Matthew 5:17 - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

The action commanded of Hosea in verse 1 prefigures the action of God in sending Jesus to this sin-soaked world so that God could have "a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). What we see in Hosea 3:1 is the great reconciliation of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Gomer's reconciliation is our reconciliation.

When we started looking at verse 1 we noted that the word "love" is found four times in that one verse, and perhaps that means "love" is the key word in the verse. But perhaps there is another candidate for that honor - a word that occurs only once in verse 1 - the word "again." Here is how one commentary describes that word "again" in verse 1:

The word "again" leaps off the page from verse 1. "Go again, love." The "againness" of God's repeated, indefatigable love for Israel is to be Hosea's purpose and passion.

By every human standard, God should have quit loving Israel long ago. But that is not at all what we see here.

These verses demonstrate the unflagging pursuit of God's love. When, by every standard, he should have ceased to love Israel, still God loves relentlessly, pursuing through the years those in whom the flames of love have long since died.

It reminds me of a famous poem by the English poet, Francis Thompson (1859–1907). As a young man, he became addicted to drugs, and, as a result, he found himself living on the streets of London while in his twenties. At the age of 31, while struggling to break free of his addictions, Thompson wrote the poem, "The Hound of Heaven" about God's relentless pursuit of him.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat — and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet —
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'

And on it goes. That description of God as the hound of heaven reminds us of the description of God that we find in Hosea. What we see in these verses is God's great love and relentless pursuit of a people who have turned their back on God and who have instead gone away to love another. And yet God persists in his pursuit; he doesn't give up on them.

In a verse that mentions "love" four times, the greatest description of God's love may be shown by another word in verse 1 - the word "again."

Hosea 3:2

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

As we said with verse 1, some argue that this woman is not Gomer, and they cite verse 2 as evidence for that view. They say that Hosea divorced Gomer and married someone else here in chapter 3, with the price in verse 2 being the bride-price of Hosea's new wife.

I don't think that is what is going on here. For the reasons we just looked at, I think the woman here is Gomer. And I also don't see any evidence that Hosea divorced Gomer after she left him. In fact, after having looked at the law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, I think the command that we see here in verse 1 strongly suggests that Hosea and Gomer were not divorced.

But if that is true, then what is this payment that we find in verse 2? Why is Gomer is not able to return to Hosea until this payment is made? There are a few possibilities.

First, Gomer may have become somebody's slave or concubine, perhaps as a result of her poverty after having left Hosea. Either of those situations could have meant that a payment would be required to gain Gomer's freedom.

A second possibility is that Gomer had either gone to or gone back to a temple of Baal to be a temple prostitute, which may have required a "donation" to Baal to regain her freedom.

Either way, we can say that Gomer had found herself in a rock-bottom situation. Back in Hosea 2:7 we saw that Gomer had something in common with the prodigal son, and I think we see that again here in Hosea 3:2.

It seems that Gomer has found herself sent into the fields to feed pigs as the prodigal son did in Luke 15:15. But will Gomer come to herself as the prodigal did in Luke 15:17? If so, will she find God running to meet her as we see in Luke 15:20? I think we know the answer to that question!

How much does Hosea pay? He pays 15 shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. That is not a large amount of silver, and barley was the cheapest of grains. (A lethech is otherwise not mentioned in the Old Testament, but in post-biblical times it was smaller than a homer.)

Why this particular price? Some compare this price to the price of a slave.

Exodus 21:32 - If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master **thirty shekels** of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

Others compare this price to the price of a bride.

Deuteronomy 22:28-29 - If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman **fifty shekels** of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days.

Still others compare this price to the price paid to Judas.

Matthew 26:15 - And said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him **thirty pieces** of silver.

Zechariah 11:12 - Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages **thirty pieces** of silver.

But there are some problems with these views. First, none of those verses mention 15 shekels, although some argue that the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas was equal to 15 shekels, and we don't know the value of the barley in shekels.

But a second problem is that this price was almost certainly not determined by Hosea or by God but rather by whomever Hosea paid to free Gomer.

God could have certainly arranged that price to be whatever he wanted it to be, but I don't see any basis or any need for that here. Instead, I think the simplest explanation is the best explanation - the price in verse 2 was simply the price that was required to free Gomer. In fact, the Hebrew word translated "bought" includes the idea of haggling, which may also be seen in the odd combination of silver and barley that was paid for her freedom.

I think we can safely say that the haggling and the low purchase price were not exactly making Gomer feel like queen for the day! This must have been a humiliating experience for her.

The key point in verse 2 is not the price. The key point in verse 2 is the redemption. Hosea went out to seek and save the lost! And that is what he did. He sought Gomer, he found Gomer, and he freed Gomer.

And let's pause here and think about these events from Hosea's perspective. We need to do that a lot in our study of this book because that is why God is commanding Hosea to do these things - so that we can think about how Hosea feels and then infer how God feels.

So how does Hosea feel? Well, he married Gomer, a prostitute, he had one child with her for sure, he may have had two other children with her - or perhaps they were someone else's children, he was commanded to give the children strange names, including Not Loved and Not Mine, at some point Gomer left him for someone else or perhaps

for more than one someone else, and Hosea is commanded to go and pay to get her back. How would we feel about all of that? I suspect that is pretty close to how Hosea felt.

But let's go back and reconsider a question we asked earlier - did Hosea love Gomer? Not love as in caring about what happened to her, but love as in the romantic love that a husband has for his wife. Did Hosea love Gomer? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

“So I bought her for myself.” Such a simple statement of so profound an act! God's instructions were clear enough: “Go yet again. Love her. Bring her back home where she belongs even if you have to make yourself look like a fool to others.” So, Hosea obeyed the call of God to incarnate God's kind of love for Israel. “So I bought her for myself.”

Although Hosea could not be commanded to have a specific emotion of love about Gomer, I think that Hosea did have that emotion of love for Gomer.

I think to demonstrate God's love for Israel, Hosea would need to have both a loving heart as well as loving actions. I don't think Hosea could have shown what God wanted him to show if Hosea had been filled with hatred and resentment toward Gomer. And I don't think we see those attitudes here in verse 2 or elsewhere.

Did Hosea love Gomer? I think the answer is yes - both with the loving actions commanded by God and with Hosea's own loving heart. I may be reading between the lines a bit in reaching that conclusion, but that must have been how Hosea felt about Gomer if his life was to show us how God feels about us.

Hosea 3:3

3 And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”

Hosea speaks directly to Gomer in verse 3 for the only time in the book. What does his statement in verse 3 mean?

Let's break it up into parts.

“You must dwell as mine for many days.”

Hosea pays someone to redeem Gomer, but there are some conditions for Gomer.

And if we are looking for some lessons about the gospel in these verses, let's be sure that we don't miss that one! Gomer has a role to play here in her own redemption.

The first condition is that she must not run off again. She must live with Hosea as his wife for many days. She must be faithful to Hosea.

But why does Hosea say “many days”? Why not until death do they part?

I think that question is answered by what Hosea is about to say next. This “many days” is not the time period in which Gomer is to be Hosea's wife, but rather this “many days” is the time period in which Gomer is to refrain from all sexual activity.

Why do we reach that conclusion?

One reason, as we said, is because of what Hosea will say next (which we will look at shortly).

But another reason is because of what we will see in verse 4 - “for the children of Israel shall abide **many days** without a king.” What we are seeing here between Hosea and Gomer is intended to mirror a punishment against Israel. And so it would make sense for the “many days” in verse 3 to also be a punishment of some sort, but against Gomer rather than against Israel.

And, as with all punishments from God, both of these punishments are intended to teach a lesson - a lesson both to the one who is being punished and a lesson to those who read about the punishment.

“You must dwell as mine for many days.” I think a better translation of that first phrase is, “Many days you shall remain with me.”

And, as we said, the phrase “many days” is most likely a probationary period during which Gomer is required to be completely chaste. We see that in the next phrase.

“You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man.”

I think a better translation of that phrase is, “you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man.” Not “**another** man” as we read in the ESV, but “**any** man,” which would include Hosea himself. Literally, the Hebrew is “not be to a man.”

But if Hosea and Gomer are still married, then why must she abstain from marital relations with Hosea, her own husband?

I think we saw the reason earlier. Gomer has been defiled. That is what we read in Deuteronomy 24:4 - “she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD.” And so, as one commentary stated, “it would seem quite unnatural for Hosea and Gomer immediately to resume conjugal relations.”

I think the best way to view verse 3 is that, as part of her restoration to Hosea, Gomer is required to abstain from all sexual activity for “many days.”

Lesson 15

Hosea 3:3 (Continued)

3 And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”

In our last lesson, we had started looking at verse 3, and we had broken Hosea’s statement to Gomer into three parts. And in that lesson we looked at the first two of those three parts.

Part 1: “You must dwell as mine for many days.”

As a review, in our earlier lesson we said that this “many days” is not the time period in which Gomer is to be Hosea’s wife, but rather this “many days” is the time period in which Gomer is to refrain from all sexual activity.

Why did we reach that conclusion?

One reason is because of the phrase “many days.” If this time period was the time period of their entire marriage, then we would expect to see - not just “many days” - but rather ’til death do they part.

And a second reason is because of what Hosea will say next.

But another reason is because of what we will see in verse 4 - “for the children of Israel shall abide **many days** without a king.” What we are seeing here between Hosea and Gomer is intended to mirror a punishment against Israel. And so it would make sense for the “many days” in verse 3 to also be a punishment of some sort, but against Gomer rather than against Israel.

Part 2: “You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man.”

I think a better translation of that phrase is, “you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man.” Not “**another** man” as we read in the ESV, but “**any** man,” which would include Hosea himself.

I think the best way to view verse 3 is that, as part of her restoration to Hosea, Gomer is required to abstain from all sexual activity for “many days.”

And now let’s look at the third phrase, which is where we ended in our last lesson.

Part 3: “So will I also be to you.”

Again, I think we should look for a better translation of this phrase. What is Hosea saying here? What is Hosea promising to do? What make sense for Hosea to say here? What does not make sense?

If Hosea commanded Gomer not to play the whore or be with **other** men (excluding Hosea), then that is hardly an obligation that Hosea would ever need to take on himself. No one would ever have thought that Hosea would ever be with other women. Hosea’s own faithfulness has never been in question.

If instead (as we have just suggested) Hosea commanded Gomer not to play the whore or be with **any** men (including Hosea), then again that is hardly an obligation that Hosea would ever need to state for himself. If Gomer is married to Hosea, and Gomer is abstinent, then clearly Hosea will be abstinent as well. Again, Hosea’s own faithfulness to Gomer has never been in question.

And, again, we are trying to find a parallel in verse 3 with something that we will see in verse 4, and so perhaps we should read ahead a bit to help us in our interpretation of verse 3.

If we do that, I think we will see that a better translation of this final phrase is “**then I shall be yours**” rather than “so will I also be to you.”

With those three translations, the entire statement by Hosea to Gomer in verse 3 would be this:

“Many days you shall remain with me, and you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man, and then I shall be yours.”

Perhaps a good paraphrase of what Hosea is telling Gomer is this:

Gomer, I have paid the price for your freedom, but you have defiled yourself by playing the whore. Because of that, I am going to require you to be completely chaste for many days during which you are not to play the whore, and for those many days you are not to be with any man at all, including not even me. After that period of many days, I will be yours again, and we can resume our normal marital relations.

Before we make a final decision on verse 3, let's look at verses 4-5.

Again, the significance of the command in verse 1, the obedience in verse 2, and the statement in verse 3 is explained by verses 4-5. The events in verses 1-3 happened for a reason - and that reason was to teach Israel the lesson in verses 4-5.

And so if our view of verses 1-3 is consistent with the message in verses 4-5, then that suggests we are on the right track with verses 1-3. But if our view here is not consistent with verses 4-5, then we will need to circle back and look at verses 1-3 again.

Hosea 3:4

4 For the children of Israel shall dwell **many days** without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.

Having now read verse 4, I think we can say we were on the right track with our view of verse 3.

In verse 3, we see that Gomer would not have **any man** for many days. Here in verse 4, we see that Israel would not have **any king** for many days.

The last *earthly* king of Israel would be Hoshea, and he would reign only until the Assyrian invasion in 723/722 BC. (See the handout for Lesson 2.)

In addition to not having a king or a prince, there are four other things that Israel would not have for many days - sacrifice, pillar, ephod, and household gods.

Of those four items, only one is *always* evil - “household gods.” The other three items can be good or bad, depending on how they are used.

- A “sacrifice” can be good or bad depending on the object of the sacrifice and the attitude with which the sacrifice is made.
- The “pillar” was most often set up for false gods, but not always. Jacob raised up a pillar for God in Genesis 28:18. We also see a pillar to God in Isaiah 19:19.
- Finally, an “ephod” refers to sacred garments worn by a priest, which again can be good or bad depending on the priest.

So how are the words “sacrifice” and “pillar” and “ephod” being used here in verse 4? In a good sense or a bad sense?

Considering the sad state of Israel at this time, I think we must conclude that these words are all being used here in a bad sense - these are false sacrifices made to false gods by false priests standing before false pillars.

And God was going to put an end to all of that. And that is something that God has already told us in this book.

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

Israel had been without the temple since 930 BC, when the kingdom was divided and the temple remained in Judah, the southern kingdom. But that did not keep the people of Israel from offering false sacrifices.

Hosea 4:19 - ...they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

And Israel also had false priests.

Hosea 6:9 - And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness.

And, of course, Israel had many false gods.

Hosea 4:17 - Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone.

But all of that was about to change. Very soon, the people of Israel would not be worshipping at all - not true worship of the one true God or false worship of their false gods. And very soon, Israel would have no earthly king at all, not even one of their weak cut-throat kings.

What verse 4 is describing is a defeated and exiled people who would lack control over their own affairs. They would lose their political institutions, and they would lose their religious institutions. They would no longer be a state; they would no longer be a people.

Would this situation last forever? No, it would not. We will see that in the next verse, but I think we can also see that from verse 4 because verse 4 does not say this situation will last forever, but only for “many days.”

Does that mean that, after the many days were over, the people could return to their false worship and their false gods? No, it does not mean that any more than verse 3 means that Gomer could return to being a prostitute after her own “many day” probationary period was over. Instead, Gomer would be expected to be pure and faithful to Hosea after the “many days” - just as Israel would be expected to be pure and faithful to God after Israel’s own “many days.” That was why each had gone through this period of many days!

How long was the “many days” in verse 4? We learn the answer to that question in the next verse.

Hosea 3:5

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

Verse 5 tells us when the “many days” would come to an end by telling us what would happen afterward.

- The people will return and seek God.
- The people will return and seek David their king.

- The people will come in fear to God and to his goodness.

And these things are said to happen “in the latter days.”

Let’s start with that last phrase first - the latter days.

That phrase always refers to the end of the world - right? Wrong!

All that phrase “latter days” means is exactly what it says - it refers to some later time period. That could be the end of the world, but it is not necessarily the end of the world.

If we want to know the time period to which the latter days in verse 5 refers, we need to look at the context in which the phrase is used.

Here, the context suggests that the “latter days” just refers to some time period after the “many days.”

It is a mistake to assume that the phrase “latter days” or even “last days” always refers to the end of the world.

Let’s look at an example from the book of Joel.

Joel 2:28 - And it shall come to pass **afterward**, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

When Peter quotes that prophecy in Acts 2, here is what he says:

Acts 2:17 - And **in the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

What does that tell us? It tells us two things.

First, Peter’s quotation of Joel 2 in Acts 2 confirms what we just said - the “last days” or the “latter days” just means “afterward.”

And second, it confirms that the “last days” or the “latter days” does not always mean the end of the world. Why? Because the first century events in Acts 2 are said by Peter to have occurred in the “last days.”

So, now let's go back to Hosea 3:5. To what time period does the "latter days" refer in that verse?

To answer that question, let's look at what is said to occur in those days, and then we can figure out **when** they happened. That will give us the time period we are looking for.

And, again, we are looking for three events:

- The people will return and seek God.
- The people will return and seek David their king.
- The people will come in fear to God and to his goodness.

That second event is a very big clue! Does it mean that the people will seek King David himself? No, and Peter confirmed that for us in Acts 2.

Acts 2:29-31 - Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

It is not David whom the people would seek, but the descendant of David whom God would set on the throne of David - and, of course, that is Jesus.

Luke 1:32-33 - He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

When did Israel return and seek God and Christ? When did Israel seek David their king? When did Israel come in fear to God and to his goodness? Those things all happened in the first century when Jesus came to this world.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

And we see that prophecy being fulfilled by the Samaritans, who were descendants of the same people who first heard Hosea's prophecy.

John 4:39-42 - Many **Samaritans** from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea **and Samaria**, and to the end of the earth.

Verse 5 is describing what happened in the first century when Jesus came to die for the world and to proclaim his wonderful gospel.

No longer were the Samaritans without a king! No longer were the Samaritans without a sacrifice! No longer were the Samaritans without a priest!

Instead, those who obeyed the gospel were added to the church, and they were once again in a happy marriage with God after their "many days" without a king - just as Gomer was once again in a happy marriage with Hosea after her own "many day" probationary period came to an end.

What happened between Hosea and Gomer in verses 1-3 was a mirror of what happened between God and Israel. And the happy ending for Gomer at the end of verse 3 was a mirror of the happy ending for Israel in verse 5. And we see that happy ending in the New Testament

when the King of kings and the Lord of lords met a Samaritan woman at a well.

Hosea 4:1

1 Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land;

There are very few things about which all Hosea commentaries agree, but one of those things is that there is a major break between chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Verse 1 itself suggests that there is a major break here and that the people are about to hear a message that is very important.

- Verse 1 begins with a call to listen - Hear!
- Verse 1 announces that what the people are about to hear is the word of the Lord.
- Verse 1 is addressed to all the children of Israel.
- Verse 1 gives the reason why the people should all listen - God has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
- Verse 1 describes in summary form the complaint that God has with them - no faithfulness, no love, and no knowledge.

While the first three chapters were focused somewhat on Hosea himself along with his wife and his children, there is nothing like that at all here in chapter 4. We see none of the intimate details about Hosea that we saw in the previous chapters. Instead, Hosea the person has completely receded into the background, along with his strange little family. (I do not think they are missing completely as some commentaries suggest, but they are certainly in the background.)

As for the message that begins here in chapter 4, we are not told when it was given, we are not told where it was given, and we are not told the circumstances in which Hosea relayed this message to the people.

But one thing that is very clear from verse 1 is the tone of verse 1. It is the tone of a very serious rebuke, and whoever receives that serious rebuke should expect a serious punishment.

Adding to the seriousness is the fact that verses 1 and 2 read somewhat like a charge in court - the defendant is identified at the start of verse 1, the charges are read at the end of verse 1, and the evidence will be presented in verse 2. Let's look at each of these three things.

And, yes, I am a lawyer, and yes, I see a court scene here - so, yes, it could be that when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail! But, lawyer or not, I do think we see a court scene here.

The word translated "controversy" in verse 1 is the Hebrew word *rib*, which means contention, grievance, strife, or legal dispute. It is the Hebrew word for lawsuit.

Exodus 23:2-3 - You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a **lawsuit**, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his **lawsuit**.

And I think that is what we see here as well - God is bringing forward a legal case against his people!

Verse 1a - The Defendant is Identified

Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.

If we are correct that verse 1 identifies the defendant, then who is the defendant? Is it the children of Israel? Or is it the inhabitants of the land? Or both? And are those two groups the same?

I think those two groups are both the same and not the same. They are the same in the sense that they both are composed of Israelites. God is not speaking here about anyone else or to anyone else.

But the groups are also different. How are they different? I think we can see the answer to that question in verse 1. The "children of Israel" are listening to the word of God from Hosea - they may or not may not heed that word, but at least they are listening.

As for the other group - the inhabitants of the land - they are the ones about whom God has a controversy. They are the defendant here. They are the ones without faithfulness, love, and knowledge.

I think we can see that distinction with the language that is used here. Think for a moment about the phrase “inhabitants of the land.” Doesn’t that phrase describe a people who have lost their identity? They have no nationality; they have no God; they belong to no one. All we can say about them is that they exist! They are located on the land!

Does that remind us of anything? Who had lost her own identity in chapter 3? Who was not mentioned by name anywhere in chapter 3? Who had lost her right to be identified as the wife of Hosea? Gomer.

I think the phrase “inhabitants of the land” here in verse 1 is another link between the wife who had rejected God and the wife who had rejected Hosea. Each of them had lost her identity as a result of her faithlessness.

So perhaps the best way to understand verse 1 is that the inhabitants of the land are the defendant in this complaint, and the children of Israel are the jury.

Another possibility is that what we see here in verse 1 is the same thing that we saw at the beginning of chapter 2 where God commanded the children to plead with their mother. But even with that view, verse 1 is still directed to two different groups - the ordinary people and the evil society in which they lived.

A third possibility is that we see only one group here - that the children of Israel and the inhabitants of the land are two names for the same group, and that God is addressing only the defendant Israel in these verses. That is possible, but the use of two different descriptions in verse 1 makes me lean toward two different groups in verse 1.

As for the view that the children in verse 1 are the jury, we do see something similar elsewhere in the prophets.

Micah 6:1-3 - Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the

LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. “O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me!”

Isaiah 1:2-3 - Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”

Those prophecies are similar to Hosea 4 in that there is a jury, but they are different because the jury in Micah and Isaiah is not the people but is instead the mountains, the hills, the heavens, and the earth.

But I think the similarity here outweighs the difference - in all three prophecies, God is speaking to a jury about the crimes committed by his people. In all three, God is making his case!

As for the jury here, we should keep in mind that there was a faithful remnant in Israel even at this time. How do we know that? Because Hosea himself was from Israel. And there were people in Israel who were listening to Hosea.

A small faithful remnant serving God in the midst of a godless society that had turned its back on God and had become “foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless” (Romans 1:31)? Does that ring a bell for us today? Of course, it does. We are that faithful remnant today.

But are we really a jury? Maybe.

Matthew 19:28 - Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

That’s a difficult verse, and we could discuss whether that verse applies to all Christians are to only the Apostles, the identity of the twelve tribes of Israel, what it means to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and when that did or will occur, and why twelve (which certainly reminds us of a jury!) - but with those questions aside, Matthew 19:28 does at least seem to suggest that the remnant’s role as a jury may not have ended in Hosea.

One more point about the phrase “the inhabitants of the land” is that it reminds us of the phrase “those who dwell on earth,” which is used repeatedly in the book of Revelation to describe those who were opposed to God. And we are also reminded of Paul’s statement about our own current citizenship.

Philippians 3:19-20 - Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on **earthly things**. But **our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, in verse 1, I think we have a defendant and we have a jury. What’s next? It is time to read the charges!

Lesson 16

So far in Hosea 4:1 we have seen a defendant and we have seen a jury. What's next? It is time to read the charges!

Verse 1b - The Charges are Read

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.

Before we look at each of these charges, let's start by counting them - no faithfulness, no steadfast love, and no knowledge. This a three-fold accusation, and it is not the only three-fold accusation we will see in Hosea.

Why three? One possibility is that these three accusations are intended to parallel in some way the three children we met in chapter 1 - Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine. Let's keep that possibility in mind as we proceed.

The first charge is that the people lacked faithfulness.

Here is how one commentary describes the underlying Hebrew word (*emet*):

This word [translated "faithfulness"], which also means "truth," is perhaps best translated here as "integrity." It is not merely loyalty, although it often includes that, but it is instead the wholesomeness of soul that comes from a life that follows principle rather than expediency. It is a determination to know the truth and live by it.

The Hebrew word means "faithfulness, reliability, trustworthiness; truth, what conforms to reality in contrast to what is false."

The person with this quality is to the person without this quality as a genuine diamond is to paste. To say that a person lacks this quality is to say that he is living a lie. He lacks moral integrity. A person

lacking this quality is untrustworthy, uncommitted, deceptive, and undecided. A person lacking this quality is a completely different person depending on his current situation.

The second charge is that the people lacked steadfast love.

The Hebrew word (*hesed*) means love or compassion. It can also be translated as mercy or grace. It describes someone who does his duty to someone and then goes beyond that duty to freely give mercy and compassion. It describes someone whose love is deep and consistent and is shown both by their actions and by their words.

A person who lacks this quality is a cruel and self-centered person.

The third charge is that the people lacked knowledge of God.

If you look back at the handout from Lesson 11, you will see that the Hebrew word translated *knowledge* in verse 1 is the word *da'at*. That Hebrew noun is based on the Hebrew verb *yada* that we first saw back in Hosea 2:8. As we noted then, knowledge is a major theme in Hosea, and the word *yada* is the same word that is applied to the knowledge between a husband and a wife.

This knowledge of God includes both objective knowledge and subjective knowledge.

Objectively, the people lacked knowledge about the nature of God, the law of God, and the doctrine of God. Why did the people lack this knowledge? We will be given one answer to that question later in this chapter - their priests had failed to teach them the truth about God. Later we will see that the priests had rejected knowledge and had forgotten the law.

Subjectively, the people lacked knowledge of God because they did not have a personal relationship with God. They could not say, "You are my God" (Hosea 2:23). We will see this subjective knowledge later in chapter 6.

Hosea 6:3 - Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth

A people without knowledge of God is a people who have believed false teaching about God or a people who have no personal connection with God. If either of those things is true about me, then I have no knowledge of God.

What that means is that I could have an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible, but if I do not have a personal relationship with God, then I have no knowledge of God.

Or I could think about God every waking moment, praying without ceasing, but if I have embraced false teachings about God that are not consistent with God's word, then I have no knowledge of God.

The book of Hosea tells us that God wants his people to have knowledge of him - both objectively and subjectively. And, as we have seen, a prophecy about the church in the Old Testament is that in the church all would know God, from the least to the greatest.

So, what then was lacking in the accused?

Faithfulness, love, and knowledge of God. Israel had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It reminds us of Jesus' stern message to the Pharisees:

Matthew 23:23 - Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: **justice and mercy and faithfulness**. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

The very last thing the Pharisees would have believed about themselves is that they did not know God - and yet that was the truth - they did not know God.

In fact, when God came down and stood right in front of the Pharisees, they did not recognize him. The Pharisees knew the most intricate details of the law, and yet they did not know God. There is a lesson there for us!

If the Christian life is a three-legged stool, then those three legs are faithfulness, love, and knowledge of God. If we lack any one of those things, our stool will topple and we will fall.

And that is not just true of God's people in Hosea's day or of God's people in the first century, or of God's people today. That has always

been true of the people of God - they have always been a people of faithfulness, love, and the knowledge of God.

And how do we learn to live this way? The Psalmist answers that question.

Psalm 25:8-10 - Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

And what would the evidence be that faithfulness, love, or the knowledge of God was missing in my life? How could I tell? I would need to look at the evidence - and that is what God gives us in verse 2.

Hosea 4:2

2 there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Verse 2 is the evidence behind the charges in verse 1.

What is the evidence that the people lacked faithfulness? Swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.

What is the evidence that the people lacked love? Swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.

What is the evidence that the people did not know God? Swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.

As for the phrase “they break all bounds,” a better translation is likely that the previous five crimes are the collective subject of this verb. That is, swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery break out in the land. That these sins appear in the land is evidence that the people lack faithfulness, love, and knowledge of God.

Why these five sins?

Well, where have we seen them before? Remember what we said in the introduction - Hosea expects his readers to know the law, and

Hosea expects his readers to keep up with him! Hosea places great demands on the readers of his book.

So, with that said, let's ask again - where have we seen these five sins?

Swearing? The third commandment.

Exodus 20:7 - You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Lying? The ninth commandment.

Exodus 20:16 - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Murder? The sixth commandment.

Exodus 20:13 - You shall not murder.

Stealing? The eighth commandment.

Exodus 20:15 - You shall not steal.

Adultery? The seventh commandment.

Exodus 20:14 - You shall not commit adultery.

We don't need to look at each of these words because we all already know exactly what they mean.

A more interesting question for us to consider is why this verse repeats half of the Decalogue! And why does it leave out the other half?

I think when we answer the first question we will also answer the second question. That is, when we figure out why these five commands are included, we will also see why the other five commandments are not included.

To help us with this question, let's list the other five commandments. So far, we have seen commands 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9. What are commands 1, 2, 4, 5, and 10?

- **Command #1:** No other gods before me.

- **Command #2:** No graven images.
- **Command #4:** Remember the Sabbath day.
- **Command #5:** Honor your father and your mother.
- **Command #10:** Do not covet.

What do we see in that list? We see theological sins (no other gods, no graven images, Sabbath day), and we see domestic or private sins (honor my parents, don't covet what belongs to others).

So what sort of commands don't we see in that list? Or, asked differently, what sort of commands do we see in verse 2?

The answer is that verse 2 lists the more socially oriented crimes - swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery. Although I suppose I can swear all by myself, most swearing occurs as part of a conversation with someone else. And the other sins on that list - lying, murder, theft, and adultery - all require at least two people. These are the sins that are open and visible to everyone in the society, and they are the types of sins that, when unchallenged and unpunished, lead to the demise and eventual collapse of a society.

I think that is why we see these five commands in verse 2 and not the other five commands. It is not that the other five are less important or were not being broken, but rather it is because these five sins were the clear and open **evidence** of the allegations that we saw in verse 1. As before, we are seeing the evidence here, and this evidence was visible and audible to all.

In effect, God is saying that the people were faithless, loveless, and ignorant - and if anyone wanted proof, all they had to do was look around! And when they looked around, what would they see and hear? They would hear people swearing to each other, they would hear people lying to each other, they would see people murdering other people, they would see people stealing from other people, and they would see people committing adultery with other people. In short, if they looked around they would see the complete breakdown in society that always results when people turn their back on God.

And, perhaps we can also look around today and see the same evidence of the same allegations. If our society is disintegrating today, then that disintegration is evidence of something that is lacking in

our society - integrity, compassion, and knowledge of God. That was true in the days of Hosea, and it is still true today.

What about the final phrase in verse 2? “Bloodshed follows bloodshed.” What does that mean?

Again, I think we know what that means. It means that the people lived in a society that celebrated violence and recrimination - and that violence and that recrimination just led to more and more of the same. We, too, live in a world in which bloodshed follows bloodshed.

But let’s dig a little deeper. Why, after all, is bloodshed mentioned twice at the end of a verse that already mentions murder?

I think an answer to that question appears once we think back over the verses we have already studied. Remember what God said after the birth of Jezreel:

Hosea 1:4 - And the LORD said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the **blood** of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”

The Hebrew word translated “bloodshed” twice in Hosea 4:2 is the same Hebrew word translated “blood” back in Hosea 1:4.

The condemnation here in Hosea 4 about the violence and bloodshed in Israel is linked with the name of Hosea’s first child, Jezreel, and the meaning of that name - that God would punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel.

As we saw back in chapter 1, the name Jezreel referred to a place where much violence had occurred - so much, in fact, that the word Jezreel had become synonymous with violence. That was the original meaning of the symbol, but we have also seen two others - a threat that God scatters, and a blessing that God sows. But here, the link is back to the first meaning - bloodshed.

I think the final phrase here in verse 2 is intended to bring us back to the birth of Gomer’s first child and the meaning behind the name given to that child. Let’s keep our eyes open for similar links back to the other two children.

Before we leave verse 2, let's look at an issue that we discussed in our study of the book of Ezra. When we studied that book we talked about the false idea that the law of Moses largely originated during the Babylonian exile. As we saw, the book of Ezra itself was enough for us to know that the Law of Moses did not originate with Ezra.

Ezra 7:10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study **the Law of the LORD**, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Ezra did not write the law - he studied it, he did it, and he taught it. And it was not the law of Ezra, it was the Law of the Lord. We see that in the book of Ezra.

But, we also see that fact here in Hosea. How? Because Hosea was written long before the days of Ezra and the days of the Babylonian exile - and we see many references to the Law of Moses in the book of Hosea (including the ones we see here in verse 2). How could that Law have been written during the Babylonian exile when Hosea is quoting it almost 200 years earlier?

Later in verse 6 of this same chapter God will tell the priests that they had forgotten the law. How could they have forgotten the law if the law had not yet been written?

We know, of course, that the law of Moses originated during the days of Moses, and we know that it was the Law of God, not the law of any man. And we know that from Ezra, from Hosea, and from many other books of the Bible.

So far we have seen the defendant, we have seen the jury, we have heard the charges, and we have seen the evidence. What's next? We hear the judgment in verse 3.

Hosea 4:3

3 Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and **even** the fish of the sea are taken away.

As expected from the severity of the charges, the judgment in verse 3 is also severe. The land mourns; the people, the animals, and the birds languish; and even the fish are taken away.

But what does that mean? What is happening here? To answer that question, we need to focus on the verbs - the land **mourns**, the people **languish**.

Elsewhere these words are used to describe the effects of a drought.

Joel 1:12 - The vine dries up; the fig tree **languishes**. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

Jeremiah 12:4 - How long will the land **mourn** and the grass of every field wither?

But I think we see more evidence of a drought here than just those two verbs.

First, I think we have evidence of a drought from the context of this judgment. What false god had the people put in place of God? Baal - the false god of fertility - the storm god!

The best way to show the impotence of Baal was to turn off the water. That is exactly what Elijah announced in 1 Kings 17:1, and I think we see the same thing here in Hosea 4:3. Rain and fertility are gifts from God - not from Baal!

And I think we see one more piece of evidence in the text of verse 3 itself. Notice that last phrase - “and even the fish of the sea are taken away.” Not that the fish of the sea disappear, but that “even” the fish disappear.

There is something surprising about the fish of the sea being taken away. A judgment of drought would explain why the word “even” appears in verse 3. Why would a drought cause the fish of the sea to disappear? Most likely the shortage of food would cause overfishing of the coastline or changes in weather patterns could cause the fish to move further out to sea. But either way, the shortage of fish would have been a surprising outcome of a drought, as verse 3 suggests.

So, I think we see a judgment of drought in verse 3, but is this a literal drought or is something else going on here?

I do **not** think this is a literal drought. Why?

First, as we have said, a judgment of drought had a very specific meaning when it came to the false god Baal. Yes, Elijah's drought was literal, but I think this drought is not. Instead, I think this judgment of drought is intended to make us recall Elijah's drought in 1 King 17 and the demonstration of God's power on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18.

Second, we know from elsewhere in the Bible that the coming judgment against Israel was an invasion by Assyria - which, much like a drought, would cause the land to mourn and the people to languish.

Third, (and maybe this should have been first) the text does not use the word "drought." All we have in verse 3 are some strong hints of a drought.

But fourth, I think we need to step back and look at the bigger picture here. What was at stake with Israel's faithlessness? What was at stake was God's promise to bless the entire world through the seed of Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 - in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

There is a crucial lesson here for us. If we are disobedient to God, our disobedience does not just affect us. Our disobedience has ripples that extend out far beyond us. Think, for example, about once faithful congregations that have gone astray - and think about the people they could have taught had they remained true and faithful to God. If we turn away from God, we create a hole in God's plan. Yes, God can fill that hole with someone else, but while that hole remains, much good that could have been accomplished is not being accomplished.

We cannot see all of the ripples that are caused by disobedience, but God can. And here the potential ripples were tremendous. God was planning to use these people to bring Christ into the world! Yes, Judah was still there, but (as we know) Judah had its own problems.

So what do we see in verse 3? What we see in verse 3 is that the entire world is suffering because of this judgment. Not only are the

people suffering, but the land, the animals, the birds, and the fish are suffering as well. All creation - earth, sky, and sea - is suffering because of their disobedience.

Why does verse 3 give the judgment a cosmic dimension? Because the disobedience had a cosmic dimension. God had promised to bless the entire world through the promised descendant of Abraham and King David, and these people were seemingly doing all that they could to thwart those plans. And if they succeeded, God's promise would have failed. Of course, we know that would never have happened, but that was what was at stake - the faithfulness of God to his promises. And that is why the judgment in verse 3 affects not only the disobedient people, but the land, the sky, and the sea.

And this was not just a problem with Israel. We see the same thing elsewhere with regard to Judah.

Zephaniah 1:2-3 - I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD.

For God's promises to be fulfilled, there had to be faithful Jews living in Jerusalem in the first century, and much of what we are studying here (and earlier in Ezra and Esther) was focused on ensuring that such would be true.

And those here in Hosea who were working against God needed to understand the cosmic significance of what they were doing. That is why we have verse 3.

But why? What had caused the people to sin in this way? What had caused the people to stumble as they had? What was the cause of the judgment that was coming upon them?

God turns to that question next - and in verse 4 we find an answer to those questions.

Hosea 4:4

4 Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest.

So far in chapter 4, God's complaint has been focused on the people as a whole (or perhaps more precisely the people as a whole minus the small faithful remnant). But here in verse 4, the focus of God's complaint narrows down to a much smaller group - the religious leadership.

In our introduction, we said that the book of Hosea makes great demands on his readers. And one big reason is that Hosea very often makes very abrupt and unexpected turns in the argument. And if we don't turn with him, we will very quickly lose his argument.

We see such a turn here in verse 4. Part of the problem is that (again) I don't think the ESV translation of the second half of verse 4 is particularly good. I think the KJV is better.

Hosea 4:4 (KJV) - Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

Yes, the ESV is easier to understand than the KJV, but remember that ease of understanding is not the test of a good translation. If the original Hebrew is hard to understand, then the English translation should be as well. And here, as one commentary explains, "although the significance of the verse is debatable, the Hebrew itself is quite clear."

So what then do we have in verse 4? The people are told not to strive against each other or reprove each other. Why? Because "thy people are as they that strive with the priest."

And what does that answer mean? That's both a very good question and a very difficult question! Let's proceed carefully.

Lesson 17

Hosea 4:4 (KJV) - Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.

In verse 4, the people are told not to strive against each other or reprove each other. Why? Because “thy people are as they that strive with the priest.”

And what does that answer mean? That’s both a very good question and a very difficult question! Let’s proceed carefully.

First, who is being addressed? When verse 4 refers to “thy people,” whose people is it?

I think the answer to that question appears when we look ahead a verse. In the next verse, we will see a reference to “thy mother.” And here in verse 4, we see “thy people.”

I think that Hosea is once again using the metaphor of a woman and her children to describe the society of Israel and the people living in that society. That is what we saw in chapter 2, and I think that is what we are seeing here in chapter 4.

Second, why are the people told not to strive with each or reprove each other? They have just been tried in a court of a law, found guilty, and sentenced. A natural response would be for them to start blaming each other for what had happened to them. But verse 4 says no. Don’t blame each other.

Why? The most likely explanation for why the people were not to blame each other is that someone else was to blame. Yes, they had their own individual responsibility, but perhaps there was someone else who had an even greater responsibility.

Who? The end of verse 4 gives us a very big hint - the priests. And as we read further, we will see that that answer is correct. The

religious leaders were ultimately the ones to blame for the apostasy of the people.

So, our third question then is what the phrase in the second half of verse 4 means. “Thy people are as they that strive with the priest.” How is that phrase an explanation for why the people are not to blame each other?

I think the answer appears when we remember what we saw at the beginning of chapter 4 - a court case. And in verse 2 we saw the evidence for the charges in verse 1. I think here in verse 4 we are again seeing the evidence - not the evidence for the charges against the people, but the evidence for the charges against the priests.

And what was that evidence? What was the best evidence that the priests were not doing the right things and were not teaching the right things? The best evidence was the people they were supposed to be teaching!

Verse 2 tells us that the people were faithless, loveless, and ignorant. There could be no better evidence than that against the religious leaders who were charged with seeing that the people were the opposite of what we see in verse 2. Had the priests in verse 4 been doing their job, the people would not have reached the sad state we see back in verse 2.

“Thy people are as they that strive with the priest.” I think what that phrase means is that the people are like those that bring evidence against the priest. The way you would strive with a priest would be to bring evidence against the priest.

And how are the people like those that bring evidence against a priest? Because they themselves are that evidence!

When the people lack faithfulness, they are in effect striving with their religious leaders. How? Because their lack of faith is itself evidence against those religious leaders. And likewise with their lack of love and their lack of knowledge.

The people may not have known they were bringing evidence against the priests, but they were - just as surely as if they had shown up in a court with evidence against a priest. They were like those who strive with a priest!

So, perhaps we can paraphrase verse 4 this way:

“Even though you are all faithless, loveless, and ignorant about God, there is no point in accusing each other or blaming each other. Why? Because when you live the way you do, you are really bringing charges against your religious leaders. You yourselves are evidence for what a poor job the priests have done.”

And, as always, there is a big lesson here for us. When we see once faithful congregations that have drifted off into the ways of the world, who is to blame? Yes, we each have an individual responsibility, but when a ship goes astray, shouldn't we look first at the one whose hand was steering that ship? I think that is what verse 4 is doing with Israel.

How well are our own religious leaders doing at their job? The best evidence with which to answer that question is us.

- Are we closer to God this week than last week?
- Do we know more about God's word this week than last week?
- Are we doing the work of the kingdom?
- Are we functioning as a healthy body?
- Are we becoming more and more like Jesus as we daily walk with him?
- Are we faithfully following the pattern left for us in the New Testament?
- Are we showing our love for God, for each other, and for the lost?

When we answer those questions about how well we are doing, we will have also answered our first question - how well are our religious leaders doing?

I think that is the same point that Paul was making with the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 - You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink

but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Listen to Paul - "You yourselves are our letter!" You are our evidence!

Hosea 4:5

5 You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.

Who is the "you" in verse 5? I think the best answer is to look at the previous word at the end of verse 4 - "priest." And we can also look at the next verse: "because **you** have rejected knowledge, I reject **you** from being a **priest** to me."

Verse 5 is directed to the priests who were just identified as the ones who were really to blame for the sad state of the people.

Along with the priest, the prophet is also mentioned in verse 5. Together, the priest and the prophet represented the entire religious leadership.

The priest stumbles by day, and both the priest and the prophet stumble by night. What does that mean?

I think it means that the priests were worse than the prophets. One might be expected to stumble by night when there was no light, but the priests also stumbled during the day when there was plenty of light.

And while stumbling itself is not the sin, it may be the consequence of sin. What is the sin that could have caused the religious leadership to stumble? Verse 5 does not answer that question, but we find some hints in the immediate context.

If we look ahead a few verses, we find verse 11: "whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding."

Drunkenness can cause stumbling, and so the sin of drunkenness may be the cause of the stumbling in verse 5. If so, we again see that the priests were worse than the prophets because the priests were apparently drinking day and night.

But I think verse 5 is not limited to drunkenness, at least not limited to *literal* drunkenness. And the stumbling in verse 5 may not be due to sin, but may be due to the punishment of sin. That is what we see in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25:15-16 - Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.”

If that is also what we are seeing here, then again the priests are worse than the prophets because the priests are receiving a more severe punishment than the prophets.

What about the final phrase in verse 5? By now, we should be used to those strange phrases that seem to appear out of nowhere in Hosea, but even so they continue to shock us and grab our attention - and this phrase certainly does both of those things: “I will destroy your mother!” Who is that?

I think what we are seeing in that final phrase is confirmation of something we said earlier - that the mother in Hosea represents the evil society in which the ordinary people (the children of that mother) were raised. That evil society consisted of the political institutions and the religious leadership, and here the focus is on the religious leadership.

The end of verse 5 is simply restating something that God has already told us in this book - that God was about to bring Israel to an end. They would no longer be a nation. They would no longer be a people. They very soon would have no political institutions and no religious leadership.

This is the same thing we saw back in Hosea 3:4 - “For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.”

That is what verse 5 means when God says, “I will destroy your mother!”

Hosea 4:6

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

Verse 5 told us that the religious leadership would be destroyed, and verse 6 tells us that the people would also be destroyed. We are immediately reminded of something that Jesus said.

Matthew 15:14 - Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, **both** will fall into a pit.

Hosea 4:6 may be the best known verse in the book of Hosea, although Hosea 8:7 is also a contender for that award.

One of the greatest Bible scholars I have ever known was a lady named Marion Williams who passed away in 1999. She studied her Bible for hours every day, filling it with her notes and comments - and I now have that Bible. In the margin next to Hosea 4:6, I think she summarized the verse very well - "What you don't know can destroy you!"

Knowledge is necessary, and don't let anyone ever convince you otherwise. Yes, the application of knowledge is also necessary, but absent knowledge we have nothing to apply. We can't apply what we don't know.

And I for one get a bit nervous when I'm told that some knowledge about God is important, but other knowledge about God is not important. I am certainly in no position to make that distinction, and I don't think anyone else is either.

When it comes to knowledge about God, I don't ever want to be like the people who are described by a quote that I found written in my grandfather's Bible: "they are like a duck paddling across the surface of a large lake, taking in only an inch of water, completely unaware of the fathomless depths that lie beneath."

Does that mean that I must have an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible to be saved or to be pleasing to God? No, but it does mean that I need to be very careful about what I do not know about the Bible. It means that I must never put my Bible down and say that

I now know enough about God. This same verse that talks about **lacking** knowledge also talks about **rejecting** knowledge! And there is no ignorance so deep as the ignorance that will not know!

We already know that knowledge of God is a central theme in Hosea, and here we see why - absent that knowledge, the people will be destroyed.

And we also already know that this knowledge of God is a broad term that includes both objective knowledge and subjective knowledge. It is a broad term that includes, not only an academic knowledge about God, but also intimate and experiential knowledge about God. It is the same word that is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the knowledge between husband and wife.

And so, while it is correct to read Hosea 4:6 and conclude that we must have an academic knowledge of God's word, it is **not** correct to read Hosea 4:6 and conclude that we must have **only** an academic knowledge of God's word. Much, much more is required to have the knowledge of God that the people in Hosea 4:6 were lacking.

I need more than an academic knowledge of God to be pleasing to God. If the only knowledge of God that I have is an academic knowledge, then I will still be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Let's consider an extreme example. One of my favorite authors is Isaac Asimov. I don't read much of his work these days, but if you had met me in high school, you would have seen me carrying a book by Isaac Asimov. He wrote hundreds of books about science fact and science fiction, and I read them as fast as I could find them. I became an electrical engineer because of Isaac Asimov.

But Asimov didn't just write books about science - I also have his guide to Shakespeare, his guide to *Paradise Lost*, his guide to world chronology, and his guide to the Bible. In that latter book, Asimov marched book by book through the Bible, dissecting and discussing everything that he found. Asimov had an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible for the simple reason that he wrote an encyclopedia about the Bible!

And what impact did all of that Bible knowledge have on Isaac Asimov's life? He was an atheist up to the day of his death. (But, of course, we know that he was **not** an atheist **after** the day of his death!)

We need much more than just an academic knowledge about God to be pleasing to God and to keep from being destroyed for lack of knowledge. We need to **know** God.

We need to have a relationship with God. We need to have knowledge of God like that between a husband and wife. And that knowledge includes objective knowledge, subjective knowledge, academic knowledge, intimate knowledge, and experiential knowledge. We need all of that - and if any is lacking, we, like the people in Hosea 4:6, could be destroyed.

There are so many lessons for us today in Hosea 4:6 that it is hard to know where to begin in discussing them. The handout for Lesson 17 has two articles from the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Chronicle* that discuss some modern-day lessons for the church.

For yet another lesson, we could listen to a very famous figure in the recent history of the church - N. B. Hardeman.

N. B. Hardeman was born in 1874 and died in 1965 at the age of 91. He was by any measure one of the best and most well-known preachers in the church, at least in modern history. He celebrated his 85th birthday with a party at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis that was attended by the then future president, Lyndon Johnson.

Between 1922 and 1942, N. B. Hardeman preached a series of sermons at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville on five separate occasions that were called the Tabernacle Sermons. Those sermons drew crowds of up to 8,000 people, with 2,000 or more turned away each night. Thousands more read the sermons daily in the local newspaper, and, starting with the third series, many more heard the sermons over the radio.

Guy N. Woods said:

“The Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons, all things considered, is the finest series of sermons ever published in the English language. As long as the world stands, they will never be surpassed for their amazing simplicity of style, striking clarity of diction, and widest possible inclusion of basic and fundamental truth.”

Brother Hardeman also engaged in frequent debates on a variety of subjects, and many of those debates are available in book form, as are all of the Tabernacle Sermons.

What were those sermons like? Here is a quote from one of them:

“There’s but one thing that I know about wherein there is an absolute certainty, and that is the work of the Lord. Stand fast in that, because we know that when we labor in His name, and according to His word, it will not be in vain; but on fairer fields and in brighter climes, in the glad sweet by and by, in a land across which the shadows have never come, a home of an unclouded day, we shall reap the handsome reward. I am saying, therefore, friends, to all of you that love the truth: buckle on God’s armor afresh tonight, raise aloft the sword dipped in the blood of the spotless Son of God, unsheathe the sword of the Spirit, march faithfully on under the leadership of Him who has never yet lost a single conflict; and by and by, when life’s dream is over, when its race is won, its battles fought, and its victories won, He’ll bid us lay aside our old battle-scarred armor on the glad plains of eternity, hang our swords upon the jasper walls of that eternal city, while with palms of victory and with crowns of glory, we sweep through the gates into the beauties and grandeurs that passeth understanding. In the sweet by and by, what will it mean to be there?”

I have a special relation with Brother Hardeman – I would not be standing here today but for N. B. Hardeman. In fact, I would not be standing anywhere today but for N. B. Hardeman. It was Brother Hardeman who recommended my grandfather for a preaching position in Paducah, Kentucky, where my future parents first met each other when they were only 14.

But, you ask, what is the relation between N.B. Hardeman and Hosea 4:6?

In 1960, when Brother Hardeman was 86 years old, he was asked in an interview to list the greatest dangers facing the church today. He listed four dangers, and the very first danger facing the church, he said, was “a lack of Bible knowledge and a light regard for what it says.”

The second danger facing the church, he said, was “a tendency to make the church a social club for entertainment.” The third danger facing the church, he said, was “a disposition to compromise the truth and discourage its preaching.” The fourth danger facing the church, he said, was “a love for the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Each of those dangers deserves its own lesson, but that first danger is the one upon which we are focused today - and it was the first danger he listed: “a lack of Bible knowledge and a light regard for what it says.” And that danger for the church is the same danger we see in Hosea 4:6 - “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

There is yet another important lesson for us here in Hosea 4:6 - the great responsibility of teachers.

Why did the people in Hosea 4:6 lack knowledge? Because the priests had rejected knowledge. The people lacked knowledge because the priests had failed to teach them.

And, unlike today, the people in Hosea 4:6 did not have their shelves filled with Bibles - they relied entirely on priests and prophets to teach them the word of God. Those priests and those prophets had a great responsibility to accurately teach the entire word of God - and they had failed in that responsibility.

And is that still true today? Do teachers today still have that same great responsibility?

James 3:1 - Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

I know there is a popular notion that we should all be teachers, but that popular notion is the opposite of what we just read from the Bible: “Not many of you should become teachers.”

Yes, we should all be ready to give an answer and make a defense (Colossians 4:6, 1 Peter 3:15), but James 3:1 is very hard to misunderstand: “Not many of you should become teachers.”

And the reason for that command is also very hard to misunderstand: “for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

If I **believe** something false about God, that is one thing, but if I then stand up, purporting to teach the word of God, and then **teach** others that false thing about God, that is quite another thing!

Why do I spend hours and hours each week working on these lessons? One reason is that I don't want to get up here and just repeat things we all already know. But a more important reason is that I know that I will be judged more strictly. I know that I have a great responsibility to be accurate in what I teach, and I know that God will hold me to that responsibility.

And if we ever put someone in the role of a teacher who is not prepared for that role, then we are doing that person no favor! Instead, we are placing that person in a very dangerous position! I do not see any other way of understanding the command in James 3:1.

And how dangerous? Look again at Hosea 4:6 - the priests who failed to teach Israel the required knowledge about God were rejected. That is very dangerous!

Moving on, the final statement in verse 6 is that "since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." What does that mean?

First, not only had the priests rejected knowledge, but they had forgotten the law. They were not teaching the law because they did not know the law. It is very hard to teach something that you don't know.

But second, God says that, as a result of the priests forgetting the law, God would forget their children. Who were their children?

Some commentaries suggests that these are the literal physical children of these priests. Being a priest in Israel was a family business! If God disowned someone from being a priest, the sons of that priest would also be disowned. That family would lose their status as a family of priests.

That is certainly possible, but I think the context is pushing us in a different direction.

In the previous verse God promised to destroy your mother, and here in the next verse God promises to forget your children. I think the "children" here in verse 6 are the children of that mother - that is, these children are the ordinary people of Israel who had been raised

in the evil culture represented by that mother. I think the children at the end of verse 6 are the people at the beginning of verse 6.

God forgetting these children reminds us of Hosea's own children - Not Mine and Not Loved!

Both the priests and the people would be destroyed. "And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Hosea 4:7-8

7 The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; I will change their glory into shame. 8 They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.

The first thing we may notice about verses 7-8 is a grammatical difference with verse 6.

Verse 6 says: "because **you** have rejected knowledge, I reject **you** from being a priest to me." But now in verses 7-8, we read: "The more **they** increased, the more **they** sinned against me; I will change **their** glory into shame. **They** feed on the sin of my people; **they** are greedy for their iniquity."

Why the switch from singular to plural? Who is being addressed here?

Some commentaries think that the conflict in verse 6 was a conflict with a specific priest, but I don't see any evidence of that in the context. I think the focus here is on the priesthood as a whole. Israel had not been led astray by a single priest but rather by the entire priesthood.

But why then do we see this mix of singular and plural?

I think the best answer is that the **singular** denunciation in verse 6 targets the priesthood as a whole, while the **plural** denunciation in verses 7-8 targets the individual priests that made up that priesthood. If so, the distinction is very subtle, and I don't think we should read too much into it. It is just a way of looking at the same problem from two different angles.

The first charge in verse 7 is that "the more they increased, the more they sinned against me." What does that mean?

Here it is helpful to recall the historical overview that we looked at in our introductory lessons. As you recall, when Hosea first began to preach, the people were living in a time of great peace and prosperity under King Jeroboam II, but that was all just about to change with the death of that king and the civil war that followed.

But, during that period of peace and prosperity, more people were able to enter the priesthood and more people wanted to enter the priesthood. And the increased headcount of priests was, no doubt, considered by the people as a sign of great religious and spiritual vitality. But that view was completely wrong.

Instead, as the number of priests increased, so did the sins of those priests. And that has often been the case throughout history when numerical growth becomes the only goal. “Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.”

And what did God say that he would do in response to that increase of sin? “I will change their glory into shame.” What does that mean?

The NIV capitalizes the word “glory,” apparently suggesting that these priests were exchanging God himself for something shameful.

But I think a much better view is that the glory in verse 7 is the glory of the priests themselves. As we said, more men wanted to become priests during periods of peace and prosperity, and the reason for that was that the priests enjoyed great status and privilege during periods of prosperity.

The priests received glory from the people who believed that their own prosperity was due, at least in part, to the priests themselves. That view of “glory” fits nicely with the view of “increase” that we just looked at.

But these priests would soon discover that glory from men is fleeting. They should have been seeking glory from God, but instead they were increasing in their rebellion against God. And so God would give them shame in place of their earthly glory. As one commentary explained:

The judgment is that someday God will bring the priests into disgrace in that he will cause the people to recognize them for the frauds they are and to despise them.

And, of course, that day was coming very soon. Rather than thanking these priests for their prosperity, the people would soon be blaming these priests for their calamity.

We see a second charge in verse 8: “They feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity.” What does that mean?

The word translated “sin” in verse 8 can also mean “sin offering.” That has caused some commentaries to conclude that these priests were feeding on the sacrifices that the people brought.

But other commentaries have noted some potential problems with that view.

First, the priests had a right to eat those offerings.

Leviticus 6:26 - The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting.

And second, the word translated “iniquity” in the second half of verse 8 never refers to a sacrifice.

I think the answer is to take a step back and look at verse 8 from a broader perspective. I think there is an underlying theme of Hosea at play here in verse 8 - and that theme is the theme of sacrifice.

The word “sacrifice” appears nine times in Hosea, and three of those nine occurrences are found right here in chapter 4.

Hosea 4:13 - They **sacrifice** on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery.

Hosea 4:14 - I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and **sacrifice** with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

Hosea 4:19 - A wind has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their **sacrifices**.

And we will see a later verse about sacrifice in Hosea that was quoted by Jesus in Matthew.

Hosea 6:6 - For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Matthew 9:13 - Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Matthew 12:7 - And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

I think verse 8 is focused on the sacrificial system.

As we said, the first half of verse 8 is likely referring to the sin offerings that were sacrificed.

Yes, the priests had a right to eat those offerings, but that right would not extend to greed and gluttony. That right would not excuse a priest whose sole motivation had become what he could get from the people.

And what about the word "iniquities" in the second half of verse 8? "They are greedy for their iniquity."

Although not used elsewhere for that purpose, I think the word "iniquity" is being used here to describe a sacrificial system that had become corrupted and that had lost its original intent.

Instead of being a means for confession and grace, the sacrificial system had become a means for permissiveness and gluttony. A modern analogy would be the Catholic practice of selling indulgences. The priests in Hosea's day likewise used the sacrificial system as a way to profit from the people and to manipulate the people through cheap grace and superstition.

I think we will see more evidence for this view as we proceed through the remainder of this chapter and the remainder of this book.

Lesson 18

Hosea 4:9-11

9 And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. 10 They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish 11 whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.

Let me start today with something that I have not said before in these classes - I want to give a compliment to the New International Version of the Bible!

Hosea 2:8-9 (NIV) - She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the **new wine** and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold — which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my **new wine** when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her naked body.

Hosea 4:10-11 (NIV) - They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not flourish, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves to prostitution; **old wine** and **new wine** take away their understanding.

I both like and dislike what the NIV has done with these verses. Let's start with what I like.

What I like about the NIV here is that it does a good job of letting us know that the underlying Hebrew words used in these verses for "wine" are different, and the NIV does a better job than the ESV (here, at least) of letting us know which word is used where.

As we said when we looked at chapter 2, the Hebrew word translated “wine” in Hosea 2:8-9 refers to freshly squeezed grape juice. And the NIV translation of those verses properly translates that word as “new wine,” where by “new” it means that fermentation has not yet had an opportunity to occur. That same word for “wine” appears here in Hosea 4:11, where again the NIV translates it as “new wine.”

The ESV translates the word in chapter 2 as “wine,” but the ESV translates the same word here in verse 11 as “new wine,” which leaves the **incorrect** impression that different Hebrew words are used.

So, for this one word in Hosea 2:8-9 and Hosea 4:11, I like the NIV better than the ESV - but the NIV should not let that go to its head! Overall, the ESV is vastly superior to the NIV.

If we are looking for consistency in the choice of English words for Greek or Hebrew words, the best English translation for that purpose is the ASV of 1901. But, in providing that consistency, the ASV suffers a bit in its readability. If you want the best combination of accuracy and beauty, then the King James Version is the best choice.

I know that I have been pretty hard on the NIV (“Nearly Inspired Version!”) - and, I would say, deservedly so! But, with that said, the problem of which version of the Bible to use is dwarfed by the bigger problem of not using any version of the Bible at all! If I never open my Bible, then it doesn’t really matter which version I have!

And even the NIV can be helpful if we read it with our eyes open - that is, if we treat it for what it really is - a commentary in which the opinions of men have been freely sown among the words of God.

Another such version is the *Living Bible*, which does not even call itself a translation but rather rightly calls itself a paraphrase. I have read the *Living Bible* cover to cover - why? Because it very often gives me a different way of looking at a verse. And yes, very often that different way turns out to be the wrong way, but sometimes that different turns out to be the right way!

Why do I bring that up here? Because the *Living Bible* really shows its colors when it comes to Hosea 4:11.

Hosea 4:11 (TLB) - Wine, women, and song have robbed my people of their brains.

And another version called *The Message* is even stranger! “Wine and **whiskey** leave my people in a stupor.” I’ll just say that someone has to really be looking hard for some whiskey to find it in Hosea 4:11!

As is often the case, we should likely just stick with the KJV (“Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.”)

You can see some different translations and paraphrases of these verses on the handout for today, and we’ll have some more to say on that topic and on the topic of wine in verse 11, after we look at verses 9-10.

In verse 9, we read: “And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.”

Verse 9 is teaching us about the justice of God. Yes, the people had been led astray by the priests, but the people would still be punished for their ways and repaid for their deeds.

And, yes, the priests were religious leaders who may have thought that because of their job title they would get leniency or favoritism from God, but we see here that that was not correct. The priests would still be punished for their ways and repaid for their deeds.

As verse 9 says, it would be like people, like priest. We see the same phrase about God’s judgment in Isaiah.

Isaiah 24:1-3 - Behold, the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, **as with the people, so with the priest**; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the LORD has spoken this word.

Or, as Paul would later write:

Romans 2:11 - For God shows no partiality.

Colossians 3:25 - For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

And, as Peter would later say:

Acts 10:34 - So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.”

That is the same message that we see here in verse 9. God does not show partiality.

In verses 10-11, we read: “They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore, but not multiply, because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.”

In verse 10, we see the sad state experienced by anyone who seeks meaning from someone or something other than God - they all experience disappointment. They eat, but they are not satisfied.

Pascal: “There is a God-shaped hole in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.”

But the problem is that people try to fill that giant hole in their heart with something or someone else - and that will always end in disappointment. And that is why the dominant emotion of our own day is disappointment. The Bible has a lot to say on this topic.

Proverbs 13:25 - The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want.

Haggai 1:6 - You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Jeremiah 2:13 - For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

And verse 10 continues on this same topic of disappointment: “they shall play the whore, but not multiply.”

In that phrase from verse 10, we see a major theme in the book of Hosea - whoredom. And that should not surprise us at all given the events from Hosea's own life that we saw in chapters 1-3.

The word "whore" appears 17 times in Hosea, and the phrase "play the whore" appears six times - with five of those six occurrences found here in Hosea 4. What does that phrase "play the whore" in verse 10 mean?

One commentary says that it means to **flirt** with false gods, but I don't think that is right. God is not calling his people a flirt; God is calling them a **whore**. These people were not just flirting with false gods; they were actively pursuing false gods in an attempt to sell themselves to those false gods.

I think Jeremiah provides for us the difference between a flirt and a whore.

Jeremiah 2:23-24 - How can you say, 'I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done — a restless young camel running here and there, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her.

That is not just a flirt; that is a whore. Yes, it is a strong word, but it is the word that God chose to use, not just once, but 17 times in the book of Hosea.

I think we should view that phrase "play the whore" on two levels.

First, we can view the phrase literally - the priests were engaged in sexual immorality.

By mixing the worship of God with worship of Baal, the false fertility god, the priests were most likely themselves engaging in the ritual fornication that was part of Baal worship. I think that is what we are about to be told later in verse 14 of this same chapter - "for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes."

But second, I think we can view the phrase "play the whore" from a broader perspective.

These priests were playing the whore with false gods - that is, they were guilty of spiritual adultery against God, which we know is a major theme of this book - and perhaps **the** major theme of this book.

Here in verse 10 we see two of those false gods - food and sex. We see gluttony and fornication.

But are we really saying that gluttony and fornication are examples of idolatry? Yes, that is exactly what we are saying.

In Colossians 3:5, Paul told us that covetousness is idolatry, and I think gluttony and fornication are also idolatry for the same reason. They are all things we place ahead of God and in front of God in our lives. By definition, this is idolatry.

When I see the word “whore” used 17 times in the book of Hosea, I should not just smugly sit back and smirk at those backward ancients bowing down to their wooden idols. Instead, I should look for things in my own life that I place ahead of God. Perhaps I am guilty of that same terrible sin!

And what is the result of this idolatry of gluttony and fornication? We have already discussed the inevitable result - disappointment. They will all fail, and that is what verse 10 tells us. The gluttony for food will end with a shortage of food (they will not be satisfied), and the gluttony for sex will end with sterility (they will not multiply or increase).

If we are led about by our earthly appetites, then we are headed only for disappointment. There is only one path that will not end in disappointment. That was Jesus’ point in John 4 when he spoke to the woman at the well (who we recall was a descendant of the same people who were listening to Hosea).

John 4:13-14 - Jesus said to her, “**Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again**, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Earthly water ends with disappointment. Heavenly water ends with eternal life. Those are the only two choices. Those are the only two paths.

Finally, in verses 10-11 we have the phrase, “because they have forsaken the LORD to cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine, which take away the understanding.” What does that mean?

The commentaries agree that this phrase is very difficult to translate, but they disagree on how it should be translated. (Again, see the many different examples on the handout for Lesson 18.)

One issue is whether the word “whoredom” should be at the beginning of verse 11 or at the end of verse 10. A related issue is to determine the object of the verb “cherish” at the end of verse 10 - is it just whoredom (as in the NIV); is it whoredom, wine, and new wine (as in the ESV); or is it something else entirely (as in the KJV)?

One proposed solution suggests that the word “whoredom” originally appeared twice in these verses, but one of the two occurrences was dropped at some point by a copyist. That type of copying error is so common that it has its own name - haplography. If that happened here, then verse 10 would tell us that the priests forsook God to instead cherish whoredom, and then verse 11 would be a proverb of sorts about whoredom, drunkenness, and gluttony. (The Amplified Version in the middle column of the handout takes this approach.)

Either way, the translation question does not really have any impact on the message on verses 10-11. The priests had rejected God in favor of their false gods, which ultimately were their own sensual appetites.

Let’s look again briefly at the words translated “wine” and “new wine” in verse 11.

As we recall, there are 14 different words used in the Bible to denote “wine.” Two of those 14 words are found here in verse 11.

The word that was used back in Hosea 2:8-9 was *tiyros* (from the word for expulsion), and it refers to freshly squeezed grape juice that has not fermented. And, as we also said earlier, the ESV translates the same Hebrew word differently in Hosea 2 (“wine”) and Hosea 4 (“new wine”).

Why does verse 11 in the ESV stress that this wine is new wine? Because verse 11 also includes another Hebrew word for “wine” - the Hebrew word *yayin*.

Unlike *tiyros*, *yayin* can refer to fermented grape juice, and, from the context, we can see that it likely does that here because it is included along with “new wine.”

But, it is not correct that *yayin* always refers to intoxicating wine, as the NIV seems to suggest with its odd translation of “**old** wine.” (That’s the part I don’t like about the NIV’s translation here.) Instead, *yayin* sometimes is intoxicating, and sometimes is not intoxicating. Here are some examples where it is **not** intoxicating.

Jeremiah 40:10 - But as for you, **gather wine** and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.

Isaiah 16:10 - No treader **treads out wine** in the presses.

Lamentations 2:11-12 - Because **infants and babies** faint in the streets of the city. They cry to their mothers, “Where is bread and **wine?**”

Often we find *yayin* combined with yet another word for wine, *sekar*, which is usually translated “strong drink.”

And, again, I’ll make the same point here that I made back in Lesson 11 - we should avoid the reckless use of the Bible to justify the reckless use of alcohol!

Yes, we can determine what the Bible has to say on the subject of intoxicating drink, but we need to proceed carefully in such a study and not make blanket unfounded assertions that ignore the underlying Hebrews and Greek words. Superficial Bible study is always dangerous, but it is particularly dangerous when it comes to the subject of alcohol. And that danger is heightened when that study is carried out by someone seeking a justification rather than illumination.

But, what about that final phrase in verse 11? If some of the wine in verse 11 is “new wine,” then how can grape juice ever be said to take away the understanding?

First, of the three things listed in verse 11 (“whoredom, wine, and new wine”), only one (“wine”) could literally take away our understanding.

But second, all three do take away our understanding in a sense. In Hebrew, the verse literally reads, “takes away the heart.” And the Hebrew word found here for “heart” is used “very widely for the feelings, the will, and even the intellect.” To take away someone’s heart means to “rob them of their rational ability to orient themselves; to hand them over to deception.”

Could “new wine” take away the heart? Yes, it could - as could whoredom. As one commentary explained, “the longing for a good wine harvest drives the people to wailing in the Canaanite fertility cults rather than to praying to God.”

Verse 11 says that the people were guilty of sexual immorality, drunkenness, and gluttony - and all three of those sins were associated with the worship of Baal. And all three of those sins took away the heart - they all took away the understanding.

One more comment about these verses before we move on - the Hebrew word translated “cherish” in verse 10 is the word *samar*. That word literally means “to hedge about as with thorns,” and it refers to something that is carefully guarded and protected.

Here in verse 10, the word *samar* is used to describe people who were guarding and protecting Baal, but that is not how this same people started out.

Deuteronomy 6:1-3 - Now this is the commandment — the statutes and the rules — that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by **keeping** all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be **careful** to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

The word translated “keeping” and “careful” in those verses is the word *samar*. The people had been told that if they carefully kept and guarded the things of God, then they would prosper in their promised land - but they had not. As we see in verses 10-11, the people were now carefully keeping and guarding the things of Baal, and so they would soon be removed from their promised land.

Hosea 4:12

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

Verse 12 is both a very funny verse and a very sad verse.

The funny part is easy to see - we have a picture here of someone who seeks guidance from a piece of wood and who wants his walking stick to tell him his future.

Perhaps the best word to describe the first sentence in verse 12 is sarcasm. And, yes, the prophets were frequently sarcastic. Elijah, for example, was sarcastic when Baal did not show up to defend himself on Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:27 - And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”

And these examples are not the only places where we see God poking fun at idols and the people who worshiped them.

Isaiah 44:13-19 - The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself;

he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Yes, there is some humor in these descriptions. Psalm 2:4 tells us that "he who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision," and I think we see that laughter here with regard to these idols.

But, of course, on another level these verses are very sad. The people to whom these verses were directed were God's chosen people. God had loved them and provided for them and protected them throughout their history. And God wanted to continue doing that. That is why God send the prophets, including Hosea, to teach the people and warn the people and guide the people.

Hosea, of course, had been sent by God to provide both guidance and oracles - but the people ignored Hosea, and instead sought those things from lifeless objects. The people did not want to hear anything from Almighty God.

Instead, they were listening to a piece of wood and to their walking stick. Yes, that is funny, and yes that is sad, but the sadness far exceeds the humor.

Jeremiah 2:12-13 - Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me,

the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

How had this happened? Verse 12 tells us, and the previous verses also told us. “For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore.”

The spirit of whoredom that we discussed earlier had led the people astray. They had followed their own appetites rather than God, and their appetites had led them to their destruction. They had forsaken the living God to instead play the whore with their false lifeless gods.

Let’s look again at that first phrase - “**my people inquire of a piece of wood.**”

It is so easy to see descriptions of idolatry such as that and to think about that problem as only an ancient problem experienced by an ancient superstitious people bowing down to their wooden idols.

But is that right? Can we just dismiss these warnings about idolatry because they do not and cannot ever apply to modern man? No, that is not right.

Not only is idolatry a problem for modern man, I think we could say that idolatry is **the** problem for modern man.

1 John 5:21 - Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

But we don’t ever seek guidance from a lifeless object, right? Well, let’s look at that question.

- Is there a lifeless object around today from which I seek guidance and oracles?
- Is there a lifeless object around today to which I turn for answers to all of my questions?
- Is there a lifeless object around today that I seek first? Perhaps something that I look at right before I go to sleep, and then look at again as soon as I wake up?
- Is there a lifeless object around today that I keep with me always and that causes me to panic if I ever misplace it?

- Is there a lifeless object around today that I believe without question, that is seemingly everywhere, and that guides me wherever I go?
- Is there something like that out there anywhere today? Perhaps something that I even bow my head to look down at while seeking guidance?

Maybe we shouldn't be so hasty in dismissing the warning in verse 12!

Marshall McLuhan, the famous media professor, once said, "We shape our tools and then our tools shape us." But he was not the first to say that. Many centuries earlier, the Psalmist wrote "Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them" (Psalm 115:8).

Has my cell phone become my god? Have I become like those in Job 12:6 who "bring their god in their hand"? Do I have more in common with these ancient Israelites than I think I do? "**Is there not a lie in my right hand?**" (Isaiah 44:19)

It is tempting to just laugh it all off and say "of course not." But do we think the people listening to Hosea would have had a different reaction when they were confronted with their own false gods?

I could preach an entire sermon on Internet idolatry - and, in fact, I have! You can find it at www.StudyHosea.com.

Hosea 4:13a

13a They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good.

Our key themes are really on display here in chapter 4. We have seen the theme of **knowledge**, we have seen the theme of **whoredom**, and we have seen the theme of **sacrifice**. Here in verse 13, we see two of those three themes - **sacrifice** in the first half of verse 13 and **whoredom** in the second half.

We talked in an earlier lesson about the high places. We recall that, as with many false religious practices, the high places started off with the best of intentions.

1 Kings 3:2 - The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

But, as with all departures from the word of God (even those with the best of intentions), this departure quickly moved further and further away from what was right.

1 Kings 14:23 - For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree.

That verse is describing the same kind of situation that we see here in Hosea 4:13. God had earlier told the people what to do with these false shrines:

Deuteronomy 12:2-3 - You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place.

But the people had not destroyed these shrines. Instead, the people had embraced these false shrines and worshipped these false gods.

Note that both 1 Kings 14 and Deuteronomy 12 mention Asherim. The Asherim were wooden pillars that stood near the altars in the Canaanite high places as depictions of the false goddess Asherah. God had given very explicit instructions regarding the Asherim:

Deuteronomy 16:21-22 - You shall not plant any tree as an Asherah beside the altar of the LORD your God that you shall make. And you shall not set up a pillar, which the LORD your God hates.

But the people had not obeyed God. In these verses we are seeing examples of why and how the people were being destroyed by their lack of knowledge.

Anyone who says that there is no humor in the Bible is someone who has never read the Bible. As serious as verse 13 is, we do see a touch of humor.

Why do the people choose these types of trees to offer their sacrifices? Is it because they have some special religious significance? Are they perhaps Baal's favorite trees? No. It is because their shade is good!

But there is more than just a touch of humor in that comment. There is also something insidious, and something that we still see today.

These false priests knew that if they wanted a lot of people to show up, they needed to make things very comfortable and very easy for them. How many would have shown up to these sacrifices had they been required to stand out in the hot sun all day? Not nearly as many as would show up to sit in the shade!

Here is how one commentary describes the situation:

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." ... 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.

Most false worship today begins with the basic misconception that we are the audience in our worship assembly. We are **not** the audience, and the goal of our worship is **not** to please us. God is the audience, and the goal of our worship is to please God. And God has told us what pleases him.

Why these three trees - oak, poplar, and terebinth? I think the main thing to notice here is not the tree types, but rather the number of tree types - three. We already know that there is an emphasis on the number three in Hosea, and this is yet another example.

Why the focus on three? We have discussed two possible reasons so far. First, Gomer had three children that are serving as themes for

the book. And second, due to the civil war in Israel, the Jews were divided into three groups - Judah, the pro-Assyrian faction of Israel, and the anti-Assyrian faction of Israel.

As for the types of trees, most likely their size and their shape made them the most effective at providing shade, which seems to have been the primary motivation of these worshippers.

Lesson 19

Hosea 4:13b-14

13b Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery. 14 I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

In these verses, the book of Hosea is making its plainest assertion yet that the Israelites were engaging in fornication as part of their worship at these shrines. Before we have had some strong hints about what was going on, but verse 14 plainly tells us that the men were involved with cult prostitutes.

As with most false religions, this one it seems had been created simply to provide an excuse for sexual immorality. And, as with most false religions, this one is pictured here as what it is: a mindless, superficial, self-indulgent cult that lures its converts with earthly, sensual desires.

We have seen that the terms “mother” and “children” have been used in Hosea to metaphorically refer to the society of Israel and the ordinary people of Israel. But here, due to their specificity and due to the context, I think we should take the terms “daughters” and “brides” literally. These sins were being committed by actual daughters and actual brides.

Here is how one commentary opened its discussion on these verses:

When women in significant numbers no longer value their virginity before marriage or their chastity after marriage, society is in trouble.

And if that is the test today, then I think society is in trouble! It certainly was in the days of Hosea, as we see from the end of verse 13. “Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery.”

And with terrible sins such as these, I suspect that none of us would be surprised to find terrible punishments for these terrible sins in verse 14 - but once again, the book of Hosea turns left when we were all expecting it to turn right. Verse 14 says: “I will **not** punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery!” What is going on with that?

Well, for starters, I think we will all agree that it is impossible to fall asleep while reading the book of Hosea! We find surprises all throughout this book!

And why is that? Why so many surprises? Could it be that God through Hosea was trying to rouse a people that had become dulled by sin? A people who had drifted into a stupor that made them very hard to reach? A people that needed to be shocked into realizing their condition apart from God? I think that is exactly why we see so many surprises in this book. God is trying to wake them up!

How do we explain this surprise? Why aren't the daughters and the brides going to be punished?

The text gives us the answer in the second half of verse 14: “for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes.”

The answer is that, once again, we find someone else who is more to blame. Remember that we saw this same thing earlier in chapter 4 where the people were told not to blame each other because the priests were to blame.

But one difference is that earlier in chapter 4 the people were still punished (even though they were less to blame than the priests) while here the daughters and the brides are not punished (even though it is hard to see how they also did not share at least some of the blame with the men).

Why the difference? Why do the women completely escape the punishment?

First, although the women appear to completely escape **this** punishment, they do not completely escape **all** punishment. They are part of the same people we saw earlier in this chapter who will receive punishment along with the religious leaders.

But second, I think verse 14 is exposing another terrible sin - a terrible sin that was committed more by men than by women.

What was that terrible sin? It was the sin of applying God's law with partiality. It was the sin of having a double standard when it comes to my own sin. It is the sin of seeing the speck in my brother's eye, but not seeing the log that is in my own eye (Luke 6:41-42).

We see an example of this in Genesis 38. In that chapter, Judah sees his widowed daughter-in-law Tamar while she was wearing a veil, thinks she is a prostitute, and engages her services. Judah later discovers that Tamar is pregnant, and in Genesis 38:24, Judah (who was just as guilty as Tamar) says, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." In fact, under the Law of Moses (that would be given later) both Judah and Tamar would have faced the death penalty.

Leviticus 20:12 - If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them.

But Judah did not see that log in his own eye!

And we see the same double standard in the New Testament when the woman caught in adultery is dragged before Jesus in John 8 while the man caught in adultery is nowhere to be found. We don't know what Jesus wrote on the ground during that encounter, but I wonder if what he wrote had something to do with that double standard. Was Jesus perhaps writing down the names of some of the men who had been with this woman? And did he write them down rather than speak them to avoid further embarrassing the woman?

God does not like double standards!

Proverbs 20:23 - Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good.

Leviticus 24:22 - You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the LORD your God.

Romans 2:11 - For God shows no partiality.

I think in verse 14 God is saying, in effect, “why should I punish these women for sins that they learned from their husbands?”

That message would have been very unexpected to the men of Hosea’s day who (much like the men of Jesus’ day) would have expected quick and severe punishment for an adulteress, with little or no punishment for the adulterer.

One commentary calls verse 14 a “landmark in moral history,” and perhaps it is. When men create a religion, they excuse their own sexual misconduct. But with the religion from God, all people - both men and women - are in the same position. God shows no partiality. Throughout history, the religions of man have denigrated women and continue to do so today, but never so with God.

And, again, we need to be thinking all along about the events in Hosea’s own life. Hosea had married a prostitute who later left Hosea and went back to a life of prostitution. And what did Hosea do? He sought out and redeemed Gomer, as God commanded him to do. Hosea could have demanded Gomer’s death, but instead Hosea redeemed her and provided a way for their previous relationship to be restored.

The women in verse 13 deserved a very severe punishment, but in verse 14 God says that he will not punish them. Gomer deserved a very severe punishment, but Hosea (following God’s command) did not inflict such a punishment.

Can we think of another example like that? Can we think of someone else who deserved a severe punishment but did not receive that deserved punishment? I think we can.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Throughout this entire book of Hosea, we need to be on the lookout for the gospel of Christ. As we have said, Hosea had bad news and good news (in that order) for the people - the bad news was that the Assyrians were coming, but the good news was that the Messiah was also coming!

The book of Hosea makes no sense at all apart from the gospel of Christ - and so it should not surprise us at all when we see prophecies

about the gospel and allusions to the gospel in this book. I think we see such an allusion here in verse 14.

What about that final phrase in verse 14? “And a people without understanding shall come to ruin.”

In verse 13, we see our themes of **sacrifice** and **whoredom**. In verse 14, we see an anticipation of the **gospel**, and here, in the final phrase of verse 14, we see our theme of **knowledge**. (There’s a reason we are calling these things **themes!** They occur a lot in this book!)

This phrase at the end of verse 14 is simply repeating what we saw earlier in verse 6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Here, in place of “knowledge” we have “understanding,” but the thought is much the same. The understanding in verse 14 is the guidance that naturally comes from the knowledge of verse 6.

Psalm 32:9 - Be not like a horse or a mule, without **understanding**, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

Proverbs 1:5 - Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who **understands** obtain guidance.

If the people lacked the knowledge of verse 6, then they certainly lacked the understanding of verse 14.

But there is a telling difference between verse 6 and verse 14 - do we see it?

Hosea 4:6 - **My people** are destroyed for lack of knowledge

Hosea 4:14 - And **a people** without understanding shall come to ruin.

Back in verse 6, God was still calling Israel “my people” - but now Israel is just “a people.” And I suspect that nearby, listening to Hosea, was a little boy named “Not Mine” who could have told them all exactly what it feels like! “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:9).

A final comment about verse 14 is that the final phrase looks a lot like a proverb, or at least like the end of a proverb. Earlier in verse

11 we saw something else that looks like a proverb - “Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.”

One commentary made the intriguing suggestion that originally verse 11 and verse 14 were, when taken together, a single well-known proverb of the day:

Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart,
and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

If so, that would mean that God has split that well-known proverb into two pieces, and inserted descriptions of Israel in between to show how Israel had become a living illustration of the decadence and ignorance described by that proverb.

Introduction to Hosea 4:15 - 5:15

Verse 15 begins a new section of Hosea that continues through the end of chapter five.

If we are still looking for occurrences of the number three, we will find another example with the three warnings to Israel in this section. And with each message to Israel, we will also find a message for Judah.

And the threes don't end there. Each of the three warnings to Israel in this section begins with a threefold exhortation, followed by indictments against the people and by an unusual metaphor illustrating the wrath of God (a wind, a new moon, a moth, and a lion).

And if we are still on the lookout for references to Hosea's children, I think we will see that here as well.

Earlier in chapter 4, we saw a section in verses 1-3 that reminded us of Gomer's first child, Jezreel, when we saw the bloodshed in verse 2.

And later in chapter 4, we saw a section in verses 4-14 that reminded us of Gomer's third child, Not Mine, when we saw the change from “my people” in verses 6, 8, and 12 to just “a people” in verse 14.

In this section (4:15-5:15), we will be reminded of Gomer's second child, her daughter, Not Loved, in at least two ways.

First, we will see harsh and violent language describing God's punishments of the people, and second, we will see messages for Judah, which remind us of the surprising message to Judah that we saw in Hosea 1:7 after Not Loved was introduced in the previous verse.

Hosea 4:15

15 Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, and swear not, "As the LORD lives."

At the very beginning of this section, we are told that it will address both Israel and Judah. So far, Israel has been the focus, and that will continue, but we will find messages to Judah interspersed throughout the text (as we also saw earlier in chapter 1).

The reference to playing the whore provides a link to the previous section and confirms that the major theme of spiritual adultery will continue in this section.

The first sentence in verse 15 is a prayer or a plea that Judah will not fall into the same trap as had Israel. Israel was playing the whore - let Judah not become guilty of that same sin.

And while Judah was not as guilty as Israel yet - we know that Judah did share in Israel's guilt later. But we also know that Judah repented and returned to rebuild the temple and restore proper worship as we saw in our study of Ezra. Yes, Judah fell, but Judah was not scattered.

And why was that important? Why this sudden prayer for Judah? Because God's plan of redemption depended on the continuation of the royal line of King David. We saw that earlier in Hosea 3:5. And we also saw that in our study of Ezra and our study of Zechariah when we met Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David.

In the second half of verse 15 we find a threefold warning in the form of three negative commands.

But to whom are these warnings directed? Let's save that question until after we have look at each of the three warnings.

The handout for Lesson 19 is a map showing the places mentioned in Hosea 4-6. As always, Hosea does not hold our hand by taking the time to remind us about the history of these locations. Instead, Hosea expects us to already know that history. And we will - as soon as we look it all up!

Warning #1: Enter not into Gilgal.

Gilgal (likely meaning Circle of Stones) was a place of great significance in the spiritual history of Israel.

It was in Gilgal that Joshua set up his first base of operations after crossing the Jordan River.

Joshua 4:18-20 - And when the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up on dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before. The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at **Gilgal** on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at **Gilgal**.

And it was in Gilgal that the people were circumcised prior to their first passover in Canaan.

Joshua 5:7-9 - So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way. When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called **Gilgal** to this day.

It was in Gilgal that the kingdom was renewed under Samuel and King Saul.

1 Samuel 11:14-15 - Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to **Gilgal** and there renew the kingdom." So all the people went to **Gilgal**, and there they made

Saul king before the LORD in **Gilgal**. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

The people of Judah welcomed David back at Gilgal after the war with Absalom.

2 Samuel 19:15 - So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to **Gilgal** to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

So, again, Gilgal had great significance for God's people, but that significance had long been forgotten by the days of Hosea. In fact, we also see warnings about Gilgal in Amos (who, we recall, was the **southern** prophet who preached in the north at the same time as Hosea).

Amos 4:4 - Come to Bethel, and transgress; **to Gilgal, and multiply transgression**; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.

Amos 5:4-5 - For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, **and do not enter into Gilgal** or cross over to Beersheba; **for Gilgal shall surely go into exile**, and Bethel shall come to nothing."

As one commentary described Gilgal, "it went from being a shrine for pilgrims to a center of apostasy." Yes, Gilgal had an illustrious history - but that had now all changed.

The first warning in verse 15 is to not enter Gilgal.

Warning #2: Nor go up to Beth-aven.

In the two verses that we just read from Amos, the prophet mentioned both Bethel and Gilgal. Here in verse 15 Hosea mentioned Beth-haven and Gilgal.

I agree with the many commentaries that say Beth-aven here in Hosea 4:15 is Bethel, so that Hosea and Amos are speaking to the same people about the same two cities.

But why then does Hosea refer to Bethel as Beth-aven? Amos actually gave us the answer to that question. Let's reread Amos 5:5.

Amos 5:5 - For Gilgal shall surely go into exile, **and Bethel shall come to nothing.**

Bethel shall come to nothing. The Hebrew word translated “nothing” in that verse is the word *aven*, meaning vain or empty. Hosea has taken Amos’ description of Bethel as vain and empty and turned it into a nickname for Bethel - **Beth-aven**. (Remember our earlier discussion about sarcasm in the Bible! I think we see another example of it here.)

In Isaiah 66:3 the same Hebrew word is translated “idol,” and in Psalm 6:8 the same word is translated “evil.” Later in Hosea 10:8, the prophet will refer to the high places of Aven - the high places of vain, empty, evil idols.

But here in verse 15 that same term for vain, empty, evil idols is being used to describe Bethel, which should have been very shocking to the people. If Gilgal was a sacred site, Bethel was much more so.

Abraham himself had camped in Bethel.

Genesis 12:7-8 - Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of **Bethel** and pitched his tent, with **Bethel** on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

Jacob saw the stairway to heaven in Bethel, and he gave the place its name, Bethel, meaning “house of God.”

Genesis 28:16-19 - Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

God later referred to himself at the “God of Bethel.”

Genesis 31:13 - I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.

Bethel was the home of the ark of the covenant for a time.

Judges 20:26-27 - Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And the people of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days...)

Bethel was originally part of the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:22), but it was later taken over by the tribe of Ephraim (Judges 1:22, 4:5). (This point will be important to remember when we get to Hosea 5:8.)

After the division of the kingdom, Jeroboam I took advantage of Bethel's sacred history to turn it into a shrine for the people in the north to use in place of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

1 Kings 12:28-29 - So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." **And he set one in Bethel**, and the other he put in Dan.

And the prophets immediately condemned Jeroboam's actions.

1 Kings 13:4 - And when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him." And his hand, which he stretched out against him, dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself.

Yes, Bethel, like Gilgal, had an illustrious past, but, again as with Gilgal, Bethel had suffered a great fall from its lofty origins.

The second warning in verse 15 is to not go to Bethel.

Warning #3: Swear not, “As the LORD lives.”

This third warning is different from the first two warnings in that this third warning does not mention a place name.

Instead, we find a very common oath in the Old Testament - “as the Lord lives.” This phrase had been used earlier by many significant historical figures, including Boaz (Ruth 3:13), David (1 Samuel 20:3), and Solomon (1 Kings 2:24).

Jeremiah later used this oath to contrast those who were loyal to God with those who were loyal to Baal.

Jeremiah 12:16 - And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, ‘As the LORD lives,’ even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

But Jeremiah also said that the people who used that oath were then often guilty of perjury. They made the oath, but they did not keep the oath.

Jeremiah 5:2 - Though they say, “As the LORD lives,” yet they swear falsely.

Jesus, of course, later gave a broad prohibition against all oaths.

Matthew 5:33-37 - Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

So, with that background, what is meant by this third warning in verse 15?

I think the context answers that question. The first two warnings both dealt with something that had been sacred but that had now degenerated into something that was empty and vain.

I think Hosea is making the same point about this sacred oath, which by Hosea's day had either lost all of its significance or perhaps was now being used in reference to Baal rather than to God.

The third warning in verse 15 is to not make this oath.

But to whom are these warnings directed?

We have only three choices - either they are directed to Israel or they are directed to Judah, both of which are mentioned in the first half of the verse, or perhaps they are directed to both Judah and Israel.

Again, I think the threefold warning in Amos is helpful here. As we see from the opening phrase in Amos 5:4, those warnings from Amos are directed to Israel.

Amos 5:4-5 - For thus says the LORD **to the house of Israel**: "Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing."

Here in Hosea, as in Amos, we also have a threefold warning, and the first two warnings in Hosea are the same as the first two warnings in Amos. Why are the third warnings different?

To help us answer that question, let's look at the map on the handout for Lesson 19. Bethel and Gilgal were in the Northern Kingdom, but they were both very close to the border of the Southern Kingdom. But Beersheba was different - it was located in Judah, far to the south of the border with Israel. Why would Amos have expected any Israelites to travel that far south into Judah?

I think we can see the answer when we note that the name "Beersheba" means "well of the oath." Perhaps Beersheba was chosen more for its meaning than for its location. The city was given that name because it was the place where Abraham and Abimelech swore an oath in Genesis 21:31. What that means is that, although the third warnings from Hosea and Amos are different, they are closely related because each of them involves an oath.

At first glance, the command not to go "**up to**" Bethel might seem to indicate that the command must have been given to Judah, given that Bethel is located very near to the border between Judah (to the south) and Israel (to the north). But the phrase "up to" here likely

refers to altitude rather than direction, and we know that Bethel was located in the hill country (1 Samuel 13:2, Joshua 16:1). So that phrase “up to” is not helpful in answering our question - everyone went “up to” Bethel no matter which direction they came from.

So, with that background, who is the target of the warnings in verse 15?

I think the answer is Israel, even though some commentaries argue that it is Judah instead. Why do I favor Israel?

First, the parallel warnings in Amos 5 are explicitly directed to Israel, and they agree precisely with the warnings in Hosea as to the first two warnings, and they agree in subject as to the third warning involving oaths.

Second, the two locations mentioned in verse 15 were in Israel. Yes, they were close to the border with Judah, but they were north of that border.

And yes, Amos mentioned a southern city in his warnings to Israel, but that may have been more directed to the **meaning** of Beersheba than the **location** of Beersheba, as we see in Hosea.

And yes, Jeremiah’s warning about this same oath were directed to Judah, but all that shows is that Judah was guilty of the same sin as Israel. It does not mean that verse 15 here must be directed to Judah.

But whether the warnings are meant for Judah or for Israel, I think the message is the same.

As an analogy, think of a parent speaking to two children - one who always obeys his parents and the other who seldom obeys his parents. The second child frequently goes places where he shouldn’t go, but not so with the first child. The parent could make the same point by warning either child not to go to those places. By warning the disobedient child, the obedient child hearing that warning would know that it applied to him as well. Or by warning the obedient child, the disobedient child would hear his parent saying to the other child, “Don’t be like your brother!” Either way, the same message would be delivered to both children.

Perhaps one commentary sums the issue up the best:

“Whether Judeans were inclined to visit Gilgal and Bethel is beside the point. The exhortation to Judah not to visit Israel’s favourite shrines is simply bitter condemnation of their cult meant for the ears of those who did worship in them.”

So, although I favor Israel as the immediate target of the warnings in verse 15, I think they are effectively addressed to both Israel and Judah.

Lesson 20

Hosea 4:16-18

16 Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?
17 Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone. 18 When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame.

These verses show us three ways that the people had become completely hardened against God. They were stubborn (verse 16), they had an unbreakable attachment to their idols (verse 17), and they had completely given themselves over to sexual immorality and drunkenness (verse 18).

God wanted to lead them like a lamb to a broad pasture where he could feed them, but they would not have it. They were like a stubborn heifer that refused to go where its owner wanted to lead it.

The phrase “joined to idols” in verse 17 could be translated “spell-bound of idols.” The Hebrew word can mean to fascinate or charm by means of spells. It means that the people had become bewitched by their false idols.

What that means is that the end of verse 17 (“leave him alone”) suggests that they could not be roused from that trance, and so no one should even try to awaken them.

Verse 18 tells us that the people drank until they ran out of liquor, and then they turned to prostitutes.

The last phrase in verse 18 (“their rulers dearly love shame”) is, the commentaries all tell us, difficult to translate from the Hebrew. The difficulty comes from the Hebrew word translated “rulers” in the ESV. That Hebrew word literally means “shields,” as the ESV explains in a footnote.

Most translations understand “shields” as the subject of the verb “love,” and they then understand those “shields” to be a metaphor for the “rulers” of the people - not that the *shields* love shame, but that the *rulers* love shame. And there is some support for that view in the Psalms.

Psalm 47:9 - The **princes** of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the **shields** of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!

But even so, it is not entirely clear that the people would have understood the shields in verse 18 to be a reference to their rulers. The immediate context of verse 18 is focused on the false idols of the people, not the rulers of the people.

Another view is that the shields in verse 18 refer to either some object associated with the false idols or perhaps to the false idols themselves. Elsewhere we see that same word applied to God (Psalm 3:3) and applied to decorative objects (Song of Solomon 4:4). Perhaps the people were now using that same word “shield,” not as a reference to God, but as a reference to Baal.

If that view is correct, then verse 18 is telling us either that the false gods loved the shameful deeds that the people practiced, or more likely, that the people loved the shamefulness of their false gods.

And which view is correct? Are the shields the people’s rulers or the people’s false gods? We can’t say for sure, but the second view is a better fit with the immediate context. Either could be true - there was plenty of shame to go around!

Our next question is this: who or what is **Ephraim** in verse 17?

This is a very important question for us. Why? Because Ephraim is mentioned 37 times in the book of Hosea, almost as many times as Israel (44 times). And, perhaps interestingly, the first mention of Ephraim does not occur until verse 17 right here in Hosea 4. Israel is mentioned 12 times prior to this first mention of Ephraim. Where was Ephraim in the first three chapters? We will look at that question later. Our question for now is who or what is Ephraim?

Ephraim was the second son of Joseph (Genesis 41:52). But, as we see elsewhere in the Bible, this second son became greater than the

first son, Manasseh. We see that prophecy in Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons.

Genesis 48:15-19 - And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. **Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.**"

And we also see the preeminence of Ephraim in Moses' blessing.

Deuteronomy 33:13-17 - And of Joseph he said, "Blessed by the LORD be his land, with the choicest gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that crouches beneath, with the choicest fruits of the sun and the rich yield of the months, with the finest produce of the ancient mountains and the abundance of the everlasting hills, with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of him who dwells in the bush. May these rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers. A firstborn bull — he has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall gore the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth; **they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.**"

And we soon see the initial fulfillment of those prophecies - Joshua and Samuel were both from the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8, 1 Samuel 1:1). Ephraim was the most prominent northern tribe.

The tribe of Ephraim was located in the center of Israel between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It was just north of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Ephraim was known as the heartland of Israel because of its plentiful resources, its favorable topography, and its robust and fertile soil. It was a hilly region that received more rainfall than Judah. Many of the tribes had trouble taking or holding onto their land, but not so with Ephraim - likely because their hilly land was less populated when they received it.

The geography of Ephraim provided the region with defense as well as commercial benefits. Its cities, Shiloh, Gilgal, and Shechem, were religious and political centers. The tabernacle and the ark of the covenant were located in Shiloh during the period of the Judges. Samuel established Saul as king and gave his farewell address in the city of Gilgal.

The political and religious center of Israel shifted to Jerusalem after David became king. After the reign of Solomon, Ephraim — along with the other northern tribes — split from Judah and Benjamin.

The northern kingdom was led by Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, who established Shechem as its first capital. Ephraim was located directly north of Judah, which meant that it was the site of many conflicts between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

Eventually, the city of Samaria became the capital. Later, the entire region was captured by Assyria and became known as Samaria.

So, with that background, why is Ephraim mentioned in verse 17?

It is often claimed that Ephraim is frequently used in the Bible to describe the northern kingdom as a whole. That is, it is claimed that Ephraim is often used as a synonym for Israel. But is that true?

When we look for evidence, we do find a few verses such as this one:

2 Chronicles 25:7 - But a man of God came to him and said, “O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the LORD is not with **Israel**, with all these **Ephraimites**.”

But is that verse really an example where Ephraim and Israel are synonyms? I'm not so sure. It looks more like a situation in which the army - or perhaps just the portion of the army being discussed in that verse - consisted largely of Ephraimites.

And for additional evidence, we are often shown verses right here in Hosea where both Israel and Ephraim are mentioned in the same verse. But if I use both words, is that evidence they are synonyms - or evidence that they are not synonyms? I think it is the latter.

I don't think these verses in Hosea support their argument. In fact, I think we will see that these verses in Hosea refute the argument that Israel and Ephraim are synonyms. For example:

Hosea 5:5 - The pride of Israel testifies to his face; **Israel and Ephraim** shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with **them**.

That verse does not show Ephraim and Israel being used as synonyms. Instead, that verse shows Ephraim and Israel being used separately - they are referred to with the plural pronoun "them." Judah shall stumble with **them**.

What is going on in that verse? Stay tuned until we get there!

But for now, let's just say that we should not automatically swallow the frequent claim that Ephraim and Israel are synonyms. I don't think there is much evidence for that claim.

But with that said, there was a period of time in which Israel and Ephraim were used as synonyms. When? After most of the rest of Israel was annexed by Assyria.

The time came eventually when just about all of Israel that was left was Ephraim, and so at that time it would make sense to refer to Israel as Ephraim. We will look more closely at that time period when we get to Chapter 5.

So, back to verse 17, what does it mean when it says that Ephraim is joined to idols? I think it means just what it says - that the tribe of Ephraim was given to idols. That would not mean that the other tribes were not also given to idols, but it could mean that the problem was particularly bad in Ephraim.

And that, in fact, is what we see with the history of Ephraim, beginning immediately after the division of the kingdom.

1 Kings 12:25-32 - Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. And he went out from there and built Peniel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” **So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set one in Bethel [which is in Ephraim], and the other he put in Dan.** Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites. And Jeroboam appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. **So he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made.**

One commentary describes Ephraim as “the ringleader in calf worship and other idolatries.” But Ephraim was not alone - 1 Kings 12 also mention the tribe of Dan. Both of those tribes were steeped in idolatry.

I think we also see these facts about Ephraim and Dan in the New Testament.

But how can that be? Dan is not mentioned in the New Testament, and Ephraim is mentioned only once in passing (John 11:54). How can the New Testament confirm that Dan and Ephraim were steeped in idolatry?

The answer is that the New Testament indicts Dan and Ephraim for their idolatry, not by mentioning them, but by **not** mentioning them!

In Revelation 7:4-8, we find a beautiful description of the church as 144,000 sealed from “all the tribes of the children of Israel.” Those verses then list twelve tribes, each of the twelve including 12,000 of those who are sealed.

Without going here into the meaning of all the beautiful symbols in those verses (which, for those interested, are discussed in detail in the notes on Revelation available at www.studyHosea.com), the point we need today comes from the names of the twelve tribes listed in Revelation 7.

We know that Jacob had twelve sons, but we also know that only eleven sons received a tribal inheritance. The tribe of Levi instead received 48 cities that were scattered among the other tribes. The tribe of Joseph was split into two tribes named for his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

So, when the tribes are listed in the Bible the list of twelve generally omits Levi and Joseph and includes Ephraim and Manasseh instead. But that is not what we find in Revelation 7. Instead, we find something very unusual.

In fact, the list in Revelation 7 is unusual in several respects. First, Judah rather than Reuben (the oldest son) heads the list. Why? That's easy. Christ is the Lion of Judah. Christ came from the tribe of Judah. The book of Revelation is all about Jesus, and so Judah rather than Reuben starts off the list in Revelation 7.

But, second, Manasseh and Joseph are both included in Revelation 7 even though Manasseh was Joseph's son.

And, third, Levi is included on this list even though Levi had no tribal inheritance.

But if this list of 12 includes Levi and Joseph, then two tribes must have been left off of this list. Who is left off the list in Revelation 7?

The answer is that Joseph's other son, Ephraim, and Dan are both left off the list in Revelation 7. Why? Why did the inspired text very deliberately omit Ephraim and Dan and replaced them with Joseph and Levi. One word: **idolatry**.

Both Ephraim and Dan were long associated with idolatry, and a key theme in the book of Revelation is the question: Caesar or Christ?

Whom should we worship - Caesar or Christ? Whom should we serve - the false idols of this world or the victorious resurrected Christ? That is the central question of Revelation.

Revelation 7 drives that theme home by deliberately omitting the two tribes that were most associated with idolatry - Ephraim and Dan. And so, the New Testament indicts those two tribes for their idolatry, not by naming them, but by **not** naming them!

Verse 17 here in Hosea 4 is also telling us that idolatry was particularly bad in Ephraim. So bad that they had been captured by its spell. Their idols had put them in a trance.

One final point about Ephraim comes from our introduction to Hosea.

Recall that for some time during the ministry of Hosea, the northern kingdom was divided into two parts - a pro-Assyrian faction led by Menahem (2 Kings 15:19), and an anti-Assyrian faction led by Pekah (2 Kings 15:29). From 2 Kings 15:25, we learn that Pekah was most likely based in Gilead, while Menahem and his son Pekahiah were based in Samaria.

Although we will have much more to say on this topic when we get to chapter 5, the evidence suggests that the pro-Assyrian faction based in Samaria was called Ephraim, while the anti-Assyrian faction based in Gilead was called Israel.

For example, Isaiah tells us that “the head of Ephraim is Samaria” (Isaiah 7:9), even though the city of Samaria was located in the tribe of Manasseh.

We’ll come back to this northern civil war in Hosea 5, but for now we can say this: not only was Ephraim playing the whore with false idols, but Ephraim was also playing the whore with foreign nations - and particularly with Assyria. In short, Ephraim was looking to everyone and everything but God and the word of God.

We have one more question to consider about verse 17 - “Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone.” To whom is that command addressed? Who is being told to leave Ephraim alone? We have a broad possibility and a narrow possibility.

The broad possibility is that the command applies to everyone else. That is, everyone else in Judah and Israel should just leave Ephraim alone because they are too far gone in their idolatry.

The narrow possibility is that the command applies only to the people of Judah, who were mentioned back in verse 15.

I don't think we need to choose between those possibilities. Even if Judah is the specific recipient of that command, Hosea was not speaking directly to Judah - instead, these words were being spoken to Israel to show how far they had all fallen. And, as we saw with the similar commands in verse 15, this command carries the same message whether it is directed to Judah or to Israel.

There is a certainly a warning in these verses that Judah should not follow in the ways of Israel - but that warning is a message for both Judah and Israel. Judah is being told not to follow Israel's example, and Israel is being told that they are a very bad example for anyone to follow.

Hosea 4:19

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

This is a difficult verse, but I think we can understand it if we keep the context in mind - it is directed to people who are joined to their idols and who love their whoring and their drinking.

Yes, that first phrase in verse 19 taken by itself out of its context could sound almost pleasant - "a wind has wrapped them in its wings" - how nice!

But we should not be looking here for a pleasant experience. This verse is directed to drunken, idolatrous whoremongers!

Literally, the first phrase in verse 19 is "a wind binds her in its wings," which is how the KJV translates it: "The wind hath bound her up in her wings."

That NIV translates the phrase to say "a whirlwind will sweep them away." But the Hebrew word for "wind" in Hosea 4:19 (*ruah*) is not the Hebrew word for "whirlwind" (*supa*). We can see both words

in the very famous Hosea 8:7 - “For they sow the **wind**, and they shall reap the **whirlwind**.” (I take back my earlier compliment to the NIV!)

I think the best way to see verse 19 is to see it in the context of verse 3. Recall that back in verse 3 we saw the effects of a terrible drought. I think verse 19 is circling back to that same description.

The word “bind” (*sarar*) in verse 19 is used elsewhere to describe the binding up of the waters.

Job 26:8 - He **binds** up the waters in his thick clouds,
and the cloud is not split open under them.

And we also see the “wind” associated with a drought.

Jeremiah 4:11 - At that time it will be said to this
people and to Jerusalem, “A hot **wind** from the bare
heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people,
not to winnow or cleanse.”

I think this wind in verse 19 is a hot wind binding the waters and bringing drought to the people. But, as we said back in verse 3, this drought is a metaphor for the actual punishment that was coming - the Assyrians. As with a drought, the Assyrians would leave the land destroyed, scorched, and useless.

And the result? “They shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.”

So have the Israelites finally seen the error of their ways? Are they now finally blushing with shame because of their past misdeeds? Has this hot wind finally caused them to repent? I think the answer is no.

The word translated “ashamed” in verse 19 can also mean “disappointed” or “confounded,” and I think that is what we are seeing here. The people had trusted in their false gods to save them, and those false gods had let them all down. As a result, the people were disappointed and confounded.

They did not repent. They did not return to God. How do we know? Because we know that the Assyrians showed up and killed or carried them all off.

Hosea later circles back to this same description.

Hosea 13:15 - Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the **wind** of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become **dry**, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

The Hebrew word translated “dry” in Hosea 13:15 is the same word translated “ashamed” in Hosea 4:19 (the Hebrew word *bus*). I think that later verse from Hosea provides confirmation that we are seeing a drought and the effects of that drought here in Hosea 4:19.

Hosea 5:1-2

1 Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. 2 And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

Although we have started a new chapter, we are still in the same section that began with Hosea 4:15 and that continues through the end of Hosea 5.

With verse 1, the attention turns back to the leaders of the people who had failed to lead as they should. Rather than leading the people toward God, they were leading the people away from God.

By now we are not surprised at all to find a three-fold call in verse 1. Three groups are told to hear, to pay attention, and to give ear.

They had been ignoring God for a long time, and they likely thought they could continue ignoring God forever - but they were wrong. No one can ignore God forever. God will always have the last word.

Who are these three groups?

The first one is easy - it is the priests. It is the religious leaders that we saw back in chapter 4. God had a word for them earlier, and God wants them to listen again because he is not through with them.

The third group is also pretty easy to identify - the house of the king. But which king?

One of the kings of Israel at this time was identified back in the first verse of the book - Jeroboam II. But Jeroboam was not the only king of Israel in the days of Hosea. As we discussed in our historical overview, when Jeroboam II died, he was followed by six other kings who all reigned prior to the fall of Israel in 722 BC.

- Zechariah reigned 6 months, and his death marked the end of the house of Jehu.
- Shallum then reigned for 1 month.
- After the death of Shallum, there were two kings who reigned at the same time: Menahem and Pekah.
- Pekahiah reigned for 2 years after the death of his father Menahem, and then Pekah became king over all of Israel. Pekah reigned for 20 years - 12 years over part of Israel followed by 8 years over all of Israel.
- Hoshea was the final king of Israel, and he reigned for 9 years.

So which king or kings were reigning when Hosea 5:1 was first spoken by Hosea?

We don't know for sure, and, in a sense, it doesn't matter because all of these kings after Jeroboam II were much alike - they were all evil, cut-throat, and disposable. Jeroboam was also evil, but at least he had reigned over a long period of peace and prosperity. But that had all changed quickly after his death.

So which king is it? I think Hosea 5:1 is after the death of Jeroboam because these judgments and pronouncements sound as if the days of peace and prosperity have turned into the days of fighting and bloodshed. And we know that the prophecy in Hosea 1:4 was written prior to the death of Zechariah, but I think that here in Hosea 5 we are now some time after that event.

There is a potential clue in verse 2 - note the word "revolter."

That word can also be translated "rebel." If that word is referring to one side of the civil war, then we must be in the 12 year period in which the house of Menahem reigned alongside Pekah. The rebels

in that conflict would most likely refer to the pro-Assyrian group (called Ephraim) led by Menahem and his son.

Because the text says that they “have” gone into slaughter, we might be in the period after Pekah became the sole ruler - although that language could be an example of prophetic past tense in which the certainty of the prophecy is reinforced by referring to it as having already happened.

Let’s keep our eyes open for other clues about the time frame, but I think the best choice at this point for the king in verse 1 is Pekah, who began to reign a year after Jeroboam’s death and then reigned for 20 years.

So far we have identified two of the three groups in verse 1 - the priests and the king. We have saved the most difficult identification for last - who is the house of Israel?

The house of Israel might refer to the people of Israel, but the focus here seems to be on the leaders of the people rather than on the people themselves.

These three groups will soon be said to have spread a net and a snare, which sounds more like what leaders might do rather than what the people might do. The people might be caught in that snare and in that net, but they would likely not be the ones spreading that snare and that net.

So if the house of Israel is not the people of Israel, then who is the house of Israel? I think the best view is that the house of Israel is not **all** the people of Israel - but is rather **some** of the people of Israel.

I think the house of Israel likely refers to the wealthy landed-owning people who were *de facto* leaders of the people because of their prominence, influence, and wealth. As one commentary explains:

“They were not the political or religious elite, but neither were they the impoverished peasants and landless laborers.”

Lesson 21

Hosea 5:1-2 (Continued)

1 Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for
you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread
upon Tabor. 2 And the revolvers have gone deep into
slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

When we ended last week we were about to look at the second phrase in verse 1: “For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.”

Once again, Hosea does not hold our hand. Hosea expects us to know all about Mizpah and Tabor.

But before we look at Mizpah and Tabor, let’s look at the word “you.” The judgment is for **you** because **you** have been a snare and a net. Who is “you”?

I think “you” in the second half of verse 1 must be the three groups who were commanded to listen in the first half of verse 1 - the priests, the house of Israel (likely the wealthy elite), and the house of the king (likely Pekah).

But why Mizpah? Why Tabor? Those are excellent questions, and I wish we had equally excellent answers! Here is how one commentary addresses those questions:

It is best to begin by acknowledging the limitation of the evidence... At the same time, we may suppose that the geographic references meant something more specific to the prophet’s contemporaries than they do to later readers.

The short answer is that we don't know for sure, but, of course, there is also a long answer. Let's start with Mizpah. And our first question about Mizpah is **which** Mizpah?

The map on the handout for Lesson 19 shows a Mizpah that was a city in the tribe of Benjamin located in Judah just across the boundary from Israel. Most commentaries think that city is the Mizpah in verse 1 because of its connection with Benjamin, which is mentioned just a few verses later in Hosea 5:8.

But why would that Mizpah be mentioned here? What is special about that city? There is a beautiful song in our songbook that might help us answer that question:

O Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise;
Teach me ever to adore Thee;
May I still Thy goodness prove;
While the hope of endless glory,
Fills my heart with joy and love.
Here I raise my Ebenezer...

What is Ebenezer, and how is it related to Mizpah?

1 Samuel 7:11-12 - And the men of Israel went out from **Mizpah** and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between **Mizpah** and Shen and called its name **Ebenezer**; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us."

Notice the phrase "Till now!" That phrase is very ominous - especially so for Israel in the days of Hosea.

It was near Mizpah that Samuel raised the Ebenezer stone to commemorate Israel's victory over the Philistines. But those days were now over. The Philistines were coming back in the form of a new enemy - the Assyrians, and it was God himself who was bringing them back.

Why? Verse 1 tells us why - it was because the leaders had forgotten what God had done for the people at Mizpah and had instead set up a snare in Mizpah to capture the people - most likely in the form of a false shrine like we saw earlier in Gilgal and Bethel.

Yes, Samuel had raised the Ebenezer stone so that the people would remember, but the people had forgotten anyway.

That is the most likely reason why Mizpah is mentioned here. It fits well with the context, and it continues the same message that we saw earlier with Gilgal and Bethel. The people had forgotten what God had done at those cities.

But, there is another possibility. Mizpah of Benjamin is not the only city named Mizpah. There is also a Mizpah of Gilead.

Mizpah of Gilead was where Laban overtook Jacob after he fled with Rachel and Leah in Genesis 31:49. Mizpah of Gilead was also where the judge Jephthah was met by his daughter after he had promised to sacrifice the first thing he met when he arrived home in Judges 11:34.

If you look at the map from Lesson 19, you will see Gilead located across the Jordan from Ephraim, and, although Mizpah of Gilead is not shown on that map, it was located near Mount Hermon (shown near the top of that map).

And, as for context, we see that (as with Benjamin for the other Mizpah) Gilead is also mentioned nearby to Hosea 5:1.

Hosea 6:8 - Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.

And if we are correct that Israel under Pekah was based in Gilead, then anyone listening to Hosea would have thought of Gilead each time Israel was mentioned.

But why would this particular Mizpah of Gilead have been mentioned in Hosea 5:1?

Again, we might go back to the civil war between Menahem and Pekah, where the Manahem faction is called Ephraim and the Pekah faction is called Israel. The revoltors or the rebels in verse 2 would most likely be the pro-Assyrian faction based in Ephraim.

But what is the connection between that civil war and Mizpah of Gilead?

We don't know for sure, but we do know that Pekah appears to have been a Gileadite because the men from Gilead assisted him when he overthrew the house of Menahem in 2 Kings 15:25.

If the Mizpah in Gilead is the Mizpah in verse 1, then it was most likely the site of some (now unknown) intrigue that occurred between Israel and Ephraim during this period.

So which one is it? That is very hard to say because each of those two possibilities is supported by a different surrounding context.

I would give the edge to Mizpah of Benjamin (as shown on the Lesson 19 handout), but Mizpah of Gilead is also a possibility.

And what about Tabor? Why is Tabor also mentioned in verse 1?

Tabor was not a city, but rather was a mountain located far to the north overlooking Jezreel. Mount Tabor is highlighted on the handout for Lesson 19.

So what happened at Mount Tabor?

- Mount Tabor is mentioned in Joshua 19, where Joshua shows that the tribes of Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali all border Mount Tabor.
- Mount Tabor is also the place in Judges 4:6 where Deborah tells Barak of God's command to gather an army, and it is the place from which Barak descends with his 10,000 men to do battle against Sisera and his army in Judges 4:14.
- In Judges 8:18, Mount Tabor was the location where the kings of Midian murdered the brothers of Gideon, leading to their own deaths at the hand of Gideon.
- Mount Tabor is not mentioned in the New Testament, but, since at least the fourth century AD, it has been suggested as the place of the transfiguration of Christ.

None of those events involving Mount Tabor stands out as a reason for why we find Tabor in Hosea 5:1.

I think the most likely reason is that Mount Tabor was one of the high places at which the people offered their false worship to their

false gods. By those false practices, the priests were catching people in their net, just as verse 1 describes.

Verse 2 says: “And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.”

As we said, these revolters or rebels are most likely the followers of Menahem, who are I believe referred to in Hosea as Ephraim. We know that civil war ended with their slaughter when Pekah overthrew them and took control of the entire kingdom.

And, again, that may have already happened given the past tense in verse 2 - or that past tense may be an example of the “prophetic past tense.”

And, as we have said, neither side in this civil war was good - both sides were evil. We see that here in verse 2, where tells us that he was going to discipline them all, including Pekah and his followers.

And it mattered not which side was pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian - their opinion of Assyria did not matter to the plans of God. Assyria was coming whether they liked Assyria or not.

Hosea 5:3

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

In verse 3 we see a very good example of what we were just talking about with regard to Israel and Ephraim, and I think we also see more evidence for the view that the rebels in verse 2 were the pro-Assyrian faction led by Menahem. And we also see confirmation that both sides in this civil war were evil.

“I know Ephraim.” What does that mean? It means that God knows exactly what Ephraim is doing. Ephraim may have thought that its schemes and plots were secret, but they were not. God saw and knew everything they were up to.

But there is also a sense in which God did **not** know Ephraim. As with our knowledge of God, God’s knowledge of us has multiple levels.

On one level, God knows everything about us because God is omniscient - God knows everything that is knowable. But there is another level in which God does not know those who are not his people. It is the same level for which Jesus would later say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).

Amos 3:2 - You **only** have I **known** of all the families of the earth.

John 10:14-15 - I am the good shepherd. **I know my own and my own know me**, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

In verse 3, God knows Ephraim in the sense that he knows exactly what they are plotting. But God does not know them as his people because they were no longer his people.

"Israel is not hidden from me." What was true about Ephraim is also true about Israel. God knows all about their schemes and their plots. God knows all about their sins and their false gods and their false worship.

Hebrews 4:13 - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

And what was it that God knew about Ephraim and Israel? God knew that Ephraim had played the whore and that Israel was defiled.

As for Ephraim having played the whore, we know that both Israel and Ephraim had been guilty of spiritual adultery with their false gods, but there was another sense in which Ephraim had played the whore - Ephraim had played the whore with Assyria.

As we have said, Ephraim was the pro-Assyrian side of the civil war between Menahem of Ephraim and Pekah of Israel. And Menahem had been looking to Assyria rather than to God for his approval and for his reward.

2 Kings 15:19-20 - Pul [Tiglath-Pileser] the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a

thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

Ephraim had led all of Israel into idolatry, and Ephraim had led all of Israel into a civil war. As a result of both, Israel had been defiled. Again, there was no good side in this civil war - both sides were evil and defiled. Both sides had rejected God.

And just because verse 3 says that Ephraim had played the whore and that Israel was defiled does not mean that Israel had not also played the whore or that Ephraim was not also defiled. In fact, we know from elsewhere that those things were also true. For example, we know from Isaiah 7 that Israel later played the whore with Rezin of Syria just as Ephraim was now playing the whore with Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria.

Hosea 5:4

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

I like how one commentary begins its comments on this verse:

“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.”

People often go into a life of sin seeking freedom, but that is not what they find. Rather than becoming free, they become slaves to their sin. And, as slaves, they lose their freedom. Although they are free to repent and return, they are effectively unable to do so because of their chains and enslavement.

Yes, the truth will set us free (John 8:32), but the truth is that “everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34).

That is what verse 4 is saying here: “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.” And we see that same teaching in the New Testament as well.

Hebrews 6:4-6 - For it is **impossible**, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, **to restore them again to repentance**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Hebrews 10:26-27 - For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

1 John 5:16-18 - If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life — to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. **All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.** We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

Romans 6:12 - Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, **to make you obey its passions.**

2 Peter 2:19 - They promise them **freedom**, but they themselves are **slaves** of corruption. **For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.**

That was the sad state of Ephraim and Israel - they had reached the point where their own deeds would not permit them to return to God. They were slaves of sin, obeying its passions and having been overcome by it.

Was there no hope at all?

There must have been some hope for at least some of the people because Hosea had been sent as a final warning of what was about to happen to them - but sadly it seems that there was no more hope remaining for most of the people.

Yes, there was hope in the Messiah who was to come, and Hosea often reminds them of that fact - but that hope was for their descendants (such as the woman at the well in John 4). The Messiah was not coming in their immediate future. Yes, the Messiah was coming, but Assyria was coming first.

And what about today? Is it possible for someone to become so far entrenched in sin that no hope remains? Are Ephraim and Israel still with us today?

We must continue proclaiming the gospel to everyone - even to those we might think will never listen to us. Like the prodigal, sometimes the most fertile field is those who have reached rock bottom in their lives.

But with that said, John's statement that we read a moment ago is both very difficult and very sobering: "There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." That is a very sad state, and perhaps we see that sad state here in Hosea - "Ephraim is joined to idols; **leave him alone**" (Hosea 4:17). "Their deeds do not permit them to return" (5:4).

And why had Ephraim and Israel reached that sad state? Verse 4 reminds us: "For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD."

They lacked faithfulness, and they lacked knowledge. That reminds us of their description in Hosea 4:1 - "There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land."

In this book of Hosea, we see the **love** of God, we see the **justice** of God, and we see the **wrath** of God. But we also see the **sadness** of God.

That the chosen people of God should ever reach such a low state as we see here is one of the saddest events ever recorded, and we see God's great sadness on full display in this book.

But God had a plan to cleanse and restore his people. God had a plan to get them back! And we also see that wonderful plan on full display in this book.

Hosea 1:10 - And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

Hosea 5:5

5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

Verse 5 provides perhaps the best confirmation yet that Israel and Ephraim are being treated as separate entities in Hosea.

Also, verse 5 brings us back to the court scene we saw earlier in this book - Israel's pride is testifying to Israel's face.

What is Israel's pride?

We know what it **should** have been. The same Hebrew word translated “pride” in verse 5 is translated “majesty” in Exodus 15:7.

Exodus 15:7 - In the greatness of your **majesty** you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

God was the true pride of Israel, and if the “pride of Israel” in verse 5 is a reference to God, then verse 5 is telling us that God is testifying to Israel's face.

But I don't think that is what is going on in verse 5.

Instead, I think the “pride of Israel” in verse 5 is describing, not what **should** have been Israel's pride, but what was Israel's **actual** pride at this time - themselves, their alliances, and their false gods. And it is these terrible sins that are testifying in verse 5 against Israel.

I think we see two things in verse 5 that always go together - pride and stumbling.

Proverbs 16:18 - Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Obadiah 1:3-4 - The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.

In verse 5, Israel has the pride, but all three stumble - Israel, Ephraim, and even Judah.

We have two immediate questions - why is only Israel described as having pride, and why do all three stumble?

As for the first question, just because Israel is said to be proud does not mean that Ephraim and Judah were not also proud. And, in fact, we know they were.

Isaiah 28:1 - Ah, **the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim**, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!

Jeremiah 13:9 - Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil **the pride of Judah** and the great pride of Jerusalem.

So why is Israel singled out for pride here in verse 5?

Israel's pride is most likely singled out here because Israel's pride was greater at this time than the pride of Ephraim and Judah.

Although we usually think of Judah as having the upper hand during the days of the divided kingdom, that was not true toward the end of the divided kingdom. In fact, Judah became a vassal state of Israel after King Amaziah's failed campaign against Jehoash.

2 Kings 14:13-14 - And Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem for four hundred cubits, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. And

he seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, also hostages, and he returned to Samaria.

And so it is easy to see how Israel's pride could have been greater than Judah's pride at this time.

As for Ephraim, if the civil war is still in view here, then perhaps Israel had just emerged victorious. As we said earlier, the past tense in verse 2 may indicate that Ephraim had now been defeated. If so, that victory may have filled Israel with pride.

That explains why verse 5 says that Israel was proud. But why does verse 5 then say that all three - Israel, Ephraim, and Judah - stumble?

First, as we said, all three were proud even though only Israel is said to be proud here, and so all three may have stumbled because of their pride.

But second, note the phrase in verse 5: "Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in **his** guilt." Whose guilt, and which guilt?

And for whose guilt, there is some disagreement over whether the verse should be translated "**his** guilt" (ESV) or "**their** guilt" (KJV). I favor the KJV on that issue given the plural pronoun at the end of the verse, but we can also see how Ephraim could stumble because of Israel's guilt. When there is sin in the camp, the entire camp suffers.

Proverbs 14:34 - Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

As for Judah, many commentaries think that final phrase was added by a later editor, but I disagree. Judah has already been mentioned in this section, and so we should not be surprised at all to see Judah mentioned again. And even if this reference to Judah did come as a surprise, that would hardly be reason to attribute it to a later editor in a book that is filled with surprises!

I think what we have at the end of verse 5 is a prophecy (from a prophet!) about the future of Judah. Judah was also going to be filled with pride, and Judah was also going to stumble. Jeremiah and

Ezekiel tell us all about it. But, unlike Israel, Judah would get back up after it stumbled. Judah would return to God.

But the sad fact is that Judah followed the bad example of her sister, Israel. We see that situation described in Ezekiel 23.

Ezekiel 23:1-4 - The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 23:36-39 - The LORD said to me: Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house.

Judah followed the bad example of Israel, and Judah was destroyed by Babylon just as Israel was destroyed by Assyria.

But Judah was not scattered forever. Instead, Judah returned from that exile to rebuild the city and rebuild the temple and restore proper worship of God. And, as a result, Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem to welcome Jesus - the Son of God, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of David - into the world.

The Civil War - A Review

Now that we have looked at Hosea 5:5, let's circle back and look again at the civil war in the northern kingdom. Although there is very little we can say on that topic with complete certainty, we have by now seen quite a bit of evidence for such a conflict, and Hosea

5:5 is perhaps the strongest evidence we have seen - it is clear that Israel and Ephraim were separate entities at this time in history.

So let's put all the evidence out on the table and see if we can piece it together in a way that makes sense.

First, we know that there must have been some overlap between the 20-year reign of Pekah and the reigns of the other northern kings. Otherwise, the reign of the final king, Hoshea, would extend beyond the fall of Israel in 722/723 BC.

We looked at all of those chronological details in our introductory lessons, and we concluded that, most likely, the first 12 years of Pekah's 20-year reign overlapped the 10-year reign of Menahem and the 2-year reign of his son, Pekahiah (who was assassinated by Pekah). What that means is that the civil war lasted 12 years and was between Pekah (Israel) and the house of Menahem (Ephraim).

Second, and perhaps surprisingly, we know that Pekah was an officer under Pekahiah.

2 Kings 15:25 - And Pekah the son of Remaliah, **his [Pekahiah's] captain**, conspired against him with fifty men of the people of Gilead, and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house with Argob and Arieah; he put him to death and reigned in his place.

How do we explain that?

First, Pekah was most likely an officer under Pekahiah's father, Menahem, and was then "inherited" in a sense by Pekahiah. We know that Pekah certainly had no particular allegiance to Pekahiah given that he assassinated him!

Second, I think we can use some informed speculation to figure out what most likely happened in the lead up to that civil war.

Who was the king just prior to Menahem? The answer is Shallum, who reigned for only a month before Menahem killed him.

So, who was Shallum? 2 Kings 15:13 tells us that Shallum was "the son of Jabesh," but that Hebrew phrase can mean either that Jabesh was his father or that Jabesh was the city where he was from - and I think the latter makes more sense here. Jabesh was a town in Gilead (Judges 21:8). (See Jabesh-Gilead on the handout for Lesson 21.)

If that is correct, then what do we have? We have a king from Gilead who reigns for one month before he is assassinated and replaced by Menahem in Samaria.

And how do we suppose Gilead would have reacted to that event? Perhaps they were considering a rebellion against a new king they viewed as illegitimate.

And who do we think the new king, Menahem, might have sent to Gilead to put down that brewing revolt? Perhaps he would have sent a captain who was from that area - and perhaps that person was his captain, Pekah. And perhaps Pekah, upon arriving in Gilead, decided - not to put down that rebellion - but rather to join and lead that rebellion.

I know there are many “perhaps” in that suggested sequence of events - but it does explain the evidence that we have, including the evidence that Pekah was a captain in the house of Menahem.

Another possible explanation for how Pekah was a captain under Pekahiah is that the two warring factions came together during a period of detente in which Pekahiah had the upper hand - but I favor the view that Pekah was an actual captain early in Menahem’s reign.

But how do we know that Pekah was connected to Gilead? When Pekah killed Pekahiah and began to rule over the entire northern kingdom, where did he get his co-conspirators? They all came from Gilead (2 Kings 15:25).

And why would Pekah rebel against Menahem? What made Pekah think he could win all by himself? The answer is that Pekah was not all by himself - he had an ally: Rezin the king of Syria.

We read about that alliance between Pekah and Rezin in 2 Kings 15:37 and in Isaiah 7. They tried to get King Ahaz of Judah to join with them against Assyria, but Ahaz instead turned to Assyria for help - which ended up being very bad news for Rezin.

2 Kings 16:8-9 - Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king’s house and sent a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and

took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin.

And, during the reign of Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, conquered the northern provinces of Israel, Gilead and Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali.

2 Kings 15:29 - In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

And as a result of that great loss, Hoshea (the final king of Israel) conspired against Pekah, killing him and reigning in his place (2 Kings 15:30). And nine years later, it was all over for Hoshea and for Israel.

2 Kings 17:6 - In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Finally, we see a bit more evidence for this view on the handout for Lesson 21.

On that handout we see two inscriptions from the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser - one about King Menahem and the other about King Pekah.

But the Assyrian king does not refer to Menahem as a king or by using the usual Assyrian designation for the kingdom of Israel (Omri-land, named after Omri, the father of King Ahab). Instead, the inscription just reads “Menahem of Samaria,” which is more evidence of a divided kingdom at that time.

Lesson 22

Hosea 5:6

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

This verse is very telling. It reminds us of something we said earlier - Israel had not forgotten God in the sense that they no longer knew who God was. Instead, Israel had forgotten God in the sense that they freely mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal. They had not become atheists; they had become polytheists.

They knew about about God - but they did not know God. And that same danger remains today. As God's people, we must not just know about God - but we must know God. And if we ever wonder about the difference between those two things, we look at the book of Hosea for an answer to that question.

No one could accuse these people of not seeking God (in some sense, at least) because, in fact, that is what we see them doing here in verse 6 - "they shall go to **seek** the Lord."

But God was no longer where they were looking. They would not find God because God had withdrawn from them.

But I thought that if you seek, you shall find?

Yes, that is true (Matthew 7:7), but the key word in that verse is the word "seek." And we can't understand Matthew 7:7 apart from Matthew 6:33.

Matthew 6:33 - "But **seek first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

If I am seeking a million different things, one of them God, then I should not expect to enjoy the great promise of Matthew 7:7. The seeking that Jesus is talking about is seeking first.

Here in verse 6, we see people with their flocks and their herds seeking their many gods so that they can placate them with sacrifices and offerings to get even more flocks and even more herds. They saw God as just another god on their shelf full of gods. These people were not in any sense seeking God first.

Again, there is a lesson here for us there. Do we also have a shelf full of gods? Perhaps the great god of **medicine** and the great god of **technology** and the great god of **luck** and the great god of **politics**? Yes, the gods have changed - but have the people changed?

What we are seeing here in verse 6 is the inevitable outcome of a people who ignored the warning of Exodus 34.

Exodus 34:12-16 - Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (**for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

“For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” But they did worship other gods, and the one true God, whose name is Jealous, withdrew from them and left them alone with their false gods.

They sought God, but they did not find God. And again, we see in that sad description a sobering lesson for our own day. We cannot expect to seek God and find God if we are unwilling to first lay down our idols.

For those seeking God first, idolatry is not just a problem - idolatry is **the** problem.

Exodus 22:20 - Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

Matthew 6:24 - No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

1 Corinthians 10:14 - Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 - Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Hosea 5:7

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

The people were faithless to God, and, as a result, verse 7 tells us that they had born alien children.

What is meant here by “alien children”? We have several possibilities.

- These “alien children” could be illegitimate children or children of prostitution that were born those playing the whore. We should recall the possibility that one or two of Gomer’s own children may fall in this category - as well as the certainty that Hosea’s listeners certainly thought as much given the names of his children (Not Loved and Not Mine).
- These “alien children” could be children with a parent (likely a mother) who was not Jewish. In our study of Ezra we saw that Judah would later have this same problem, which led to the command in Ezra 10 to expel the foreign women and their children from the city.
- These “alien children” could be children who were alien to God because they had never been taught about God. Such children were raised to be children of Baal rather than children of God. Like Hosea’s own child, God would call them “Not Mine.”

We can be sure that there were many children in each of these three categories, so I'm not sure we have to choose only one possibility. The text could be inviting us to see all three of these situations.

But if we did choose, I think we should lean toward the third possibility - that these children had not been raised by their parents to know God. We are reminded that this had long been a problem for God's people.

Judges 2:10 - And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. **And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.**

We are also reminded of the *Shema* (for the Hebrew word, "hear") that has been recited by Jews for centuries as a daily prayer.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.** You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

God's plan of redemption depended on parents teaching his word to their children.

Deuteronomy 4:8-9 - And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. **Make them known to your children and your children's children.**

Deuteronomy 6:20-21 - **When your son asks you** in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies

and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' **then you shall say to your son**, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.'

But that was no longer happening in Israel. The parents were no longer teaching, and the children were no longer asking. The people had born "alien children." They were alien to God, to the word of God, and to the ways of God. They did not know what God had done for them.

In the second half of verse 7, we read, as one commentary notes, a phrase that has long "mystified interpreters" - "Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields." What does that mean?

This phrase is often seen as a reference to the sacrifices to false gods that were made at the time of the new moon, but in that case we would more likely expect the "new moon" in verse 7 to be consuming livestock for the sacrifices rather than consuming their fields.

Other suggestions are that the text of the phrase "new moon" has been corrupted and should instead be the phrase "red blight" or the phrase "someone else" (playing on the word "alien" in the first half of the verse). But I think it is a bit lazy for a commentary to immediately conclude that the text must have been corrupted just because that commentator is having trouble understanding what the text means!

So how do we figure it out? As always, let's start with the context. The same phrase "new moon" was used earlier in this book.

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

And there we saw that the "new moon" was sometimes used to describe the true worship of God (2 Chronicles 2:4, Ezra 3:4-5). But now the people had mixed the true worship of God with the false worship of Baal. They had turned their back on God, but they had not turned their back on the rituals of God.

I think the reference to "new moon" here in verse 7 should be understood in that same context. And we see something similar in Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:13-15 - Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. **New moon** and Sabbath and the calling of convocations — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your **new moons** and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

What Isaiah says in 100 words, Hosea says in 10 words. The people's false religious ceremonies dedicated to their false gods would be their downfall.

But why is that downfall described as a loss of their **fields**?

I think the answer is **darkness**. The fields would be devoured by darkness.

As we know, a "new moon" occurs when the moon is between Earth and the sun, and the side of the moon facing toward us receives no direct sunlight. A new moon is the opposite of a full moon. And so the phrase "new moon" means **darkness**.

We will see something similar later in our study of Joel.

Joel 2:10 - The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

Joel 3:15 - The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

I think the punishment in verse 7 is that darkness would envelop the land.

And that punishment certainly makes sense for the crime of failing to teach your children to know God because darkness is exactly what they (or we) should expect when they (or we) fail to teach their (or our) children about God.

What will this congregation be like 50 years from now? What will be happening within these walls 50 years from now? What will be taught from this pulpit 50 years from now?

Luke 18:8 - When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

The answers to all of those questions depends on how well we teach our children. Will we be followed by a generation that knows God? It is our great task to see that the answer to that question is yes.

Here in Hosea we see an example where the answer was no, and we see the great darkness that came as a result of that failure.

Hosea 5:8

8 Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!

This is a difficult verse, so let's proceed carefully. Let's start by looking at the three cities mentioned in verse 8.

As we said earlier, Beth-aven is Hosea's sarcastic nickname for Bethel using the Hebrew word *aven* meaning vain or empty. And so, the three cities in verse 8 are Gibeah, Ramah, and Bethel.

And we have already looked at Bethel. But what about Gibeah and Ramah?

Gibeah (not to be confused with nearby Gibeon) is frequently mentioned in the Bible and was the location of a very dark and disturbing event.

In Judges 19-20, a Levite was taken into a home in Gibeah, but he was then threatened with sexual violence by the locals, called "worthless fellows" in Judges 19:22. They instead assaulted the Levite's concubine, and she died.

They assaulted her, and then she died. Does that mean that they killed her? The answer to that question is not entirely clear.

Judges 19:27-29 - And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. **He said to her, "Get up, let us be going." But there was no answer.** Then he put her

on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home. And when he entered his house, **he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces**, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

Judges 20:4-5 - And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, “I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night. And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and **they violated my concubine, and she is dead.**

I think the text leaves open the possibility that the Levite killed his own concubine after she was assaulted.

In the aftermath, the men of Israel banded together as “one man” to exact justice on the wicked men of Gibeah. A great battle took place with heavy losses on each side.

This strange event would have been immediately in the mind of any Jew who heard someone refer to Gibeah. And, in fact, I think we will see a reference to this strange event later in Hosea 9:9 - “they have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah.”

As for Ramah, following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Ramah seems to have served as a staging point for Jews leaving for exile into Babylon.

Jeremiah 40:1 - The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.

And, today, of course, when we think of Ramah, we think of Jesus.

Matthew 2:16-18 - Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet

Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in **Ramah**, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

And that prophecy from Jeremiah 31:15 points us back to someone else we see here in verse 8 - Benjamin.

Genesis 35:16-20 - Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him **Benjamin**. So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.

But why do we see these three cities here in verse 8? That background is interesting, but does it help answer our question? Perhaps not. There may be a simpler answer.

If we look at the map from the Lesson 19 handout, we see that these three cities are located almost in a straight line directly north of Jerusalem with Gibeah being the southernmost city and Bethel the northernmost.

That observation has caused many commentaries to conclude that verse 8 is describing a military expedition from Judah that moved north through these cities.

But before we also reach that conclusion, let's look a bit more closely.

What about the horn, the trumpet, and the alarm that we also find in verse 8?

Are these horns and alarms being sounded as part of an **offensive** military campaign or instead as part of **defensive** warfare? We can't say for sure, but again the **order** of the cities might suggest an offensive campaign heading north out of Jerusalem.

What about the phrase at the end: “we follow you, O Benjamin!” What does that mean?

Literally, the phrase is, “Behind you, Benjamin!” Some suggest it was a traditional battle cry for mounting an attack, perhaps reflecting the fact that Benjamin had a tradition of military leadership.

Psalm 68:27 - There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

But the Hebrew phrase could also mean, “Benjamin is behind you” or even, “Look out behind you, Benjamin!” All three of these cities were located in the tribe of Benjamin. Here is how one commentary describes the phrase:

By the time of Hosea the phrase may have become a formulaic battle cry with no specific assertion of Benjamite leadership. ... We probably are on the safest ground if we take the line as a war cry that, in the course of time, became divorced from a concrete historical setting, somewhat like “Remember the Alamo!”

If a specific military event is being described here, then which event is it?

Is it a war between Judah and Ephraim over these Benjamite cities - or is it a war in which Judah and Ephraim are fighting together against some outside enemy?

The most likely candidate is the Syro-Ephraimite invasion of Judah in which Syria and Ephraim combined forces to invade Judah after Judah refused to help them in their fight against Assyria. We read about that invasion in 2 Kings 16 and in Isaiah 7.

2 Kings 16:5-7 - Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. At that time Rezin the king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah from Elath, and the Edomites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”

And, yes, that battle is a possibility for what we see here in verse 8, but that interpretation does have some problems.

First, the order of the cities in verse 8 suggests that Judah was the aggressor, but Judah was on the defensive in 2 Kings 16:5.

And, second, it was Judah that turned to Assyria for help in the Syro-Ephraimite war, but later in Hosea 5:13 we will see Ephraim turning to Assyria for help.

So where are we? I think we have two possibilities. Either verse 8 is describing some specific military event, or verse 8 is instead a general reference to the people's reliance on their military power to save them.

I lean toward the latter given the brevity of verse 8, the context of verse 8, and the difficulty in finding a specific military event that fits.

Taken together with verse 7, I think Hosea's message is simple: you have born alien children, and neither your false religious rituals nor your supposed military might will save you from the coming Assyrians.

So, I think the best way to understand verse 8 is that God is (perhaps, sarcastically) telling the people not to rely on their own military power.

And why do I say sarcastically? Because of that final slogan: "We follow you, O Benjamin!" I think the glory days of Benjamin were long over, and so I think most of the people would have heard some sarcasm here.

In modern terms, I think Hosea is saying: "You can shout 'Remember the Alamo' all you want to and act like you are going to charge into battle - but it matters not. The Assyrians are coming, and there is nothing you can do to stop them."

Hosea 5:9-10

9 Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. 10 The princes of Judah have become like those

who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.

Who or what is Ephraim? I thought we answered that, and we did, but we need to ask it again!

As we said, during the civil war in the northern kingdom, Menahem's faction (based in Samaria) was called Ephraim, and Pekah's faction (based in Gilead) was called Israel.

But what about **after** that civil war? What about the 8 years of Pekah's reign after he killed Pekahiah? Was Pekah's kingdom still called Israel?

I think Isaiah helps us with that question.

Isaiah 7:1-2 - In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and **Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel** came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. When the house of David was told, "**Syria is in league with Ephraim,**" the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

After Pekah took control of the northern kingdom by murdering Pekahiah in Samaria, Pekah stayed in Samaria.

Isaiah 7:9 - And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

So whether Ephraim refers to Menahem or Pekah depends on **when** we ask that question! If we ask it **during** the civil war, then the answer is Menahem. If we ask it **after** the civil war, then the answer is Pekah. Either way, Ephraim is used to describe the king who was presently reigning in Samaria.

The focus here on just Ephraim and Judah might suggest that we are now located in time after the civil war, but I think we will see later in verse 13 that the civil war has not yet ended. I think the events in Isaiah 7 are most likely future to the events in Hosea 5, but there is some disagreement on that issue. Let's leave it as an open question until we see some more evidence.

The first half of verse 9 is telling us something we already know - there was no good side in this civil war, and so the “winner” of that conflict will become a desolation in the day of punishment. That is, Assyria was coming, and Assyria would not care who won or lost that civil war.

What about that second phrase? “Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.” What does that mean?

We know that at this time there not many tribes left. Verses 9-10 mention only two tribes, or more precisely, only 1.5 tribes, with Ephraim being a half tribe.

I think the focus of this phrase at the end of verse 9 is not just on the tribes that were left in the land, but is instead a call for the people to think back to the days when there were in fact 12 tribes in the promised land from God.

I think this short phrase is a rebuke - both a rebuke for how far the people had fallen from their glory days when they trusted in God, and also a rebuke for their lack of unity as the one people of God. They had gone from 12 tribes to 1.5 tribes - and that tribe and half-tribe were at war with each other!

And if Judah thought that it was going to miss the fireworks, then it needed to think again: “The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.”

The princes of Judah here are the leaders of Judah, and those leaders are described here as being like those who move the landmark. What does that mean?

If the previous verse was describing a military excursion of Judah into Israel, then this verse would likely be referring to Judah’s encroachment into the northern territory - that is, Judah effectively moved the boundary between the two kingdoms when Judah invaded the north.

But there is a problem with that view - it does not fit well with what we know about the history of the time. In short, we don’t really have any evidence that Judah was planning to invade and take territory from the north.

Instead, history tells us that Judah was facing the opposite problem - Judah was being invaded by Ephraim and by Assyria.

And, if we want to be really precise, the text does not say that the leaders moved the landmark - the text says that the leaders **have become like** those who move the landmark.

So that leaves us with another question - what does it mean to be like someone who moves the landmark? As it turns out, we have an answer to that question: they are cursed.

Deuteronomy 27:17 - 'Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

People who move landmarks are not good neighbors. Instead, they are just common thieves, looking for any and every way to profit off of their neighbors.

And what about Judah - was Judah a good neighbor?

I think the first statement in verse 10 is answering that question with a resounding **no!** And I don't think we have any basis to read much more into the statement than that.

And what is the result? What is the punishment? Verse 10 tells us: "upon them I will pour out my wrath like water."

And once again Hosea uses 10 words to tell us what Isaiah said in 100 words.

Isaiah 8:6-8 - Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, **and it will sweep on into Judah**, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

We know that Assyria invaded **Israel**, but did Assyria also invade **Judah**? Yes, it did (as we see on the handout for Lesson 22 - but note that Assyria did not reach Jerusalem!).

But did Assyria also carry off and scatter Judah like it did with Israel? No, Assyria did not. And we looked at the remarkable reason for that failure in our introduction.

As we recall, King Hezekiah (the fourth king of Judah mentioned in Hosea 1:1) rebelled against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7).

And, as a result, the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18:13).

And, as he had done with Ahaz, the prophet Isaiah came to deliver God's word to Hezekiah. But, unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah listened to that word from God, and Hezekiah prayed to God for deliverance (2 Kings 19:19).

And, as a result, one of the most amazing things, not just in the Bible, but in all recorded history, happened.

2 Kings 19:35-36 - And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.

God did not allow Assyria to do to Judah what Assyria had done to Israel.

So, yes, Assyria did attack Judah, but no, Judah did not suffer the same fate as Israel.

The final phrase here in verse 10 is likely pointing to that Assyrian attack as well as the later punishments that came upon the leaders of Judah from Babylon. "Upon them I will pour out my wrath like water."

Lesson 23

Hosea 5:11

11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.

We have been in a particularly difficult section of Hosea. Verses 7, 8, and 10 were difficult verses, and verse 11 is yet another difficult verse.

The first part is easy - Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment.

That, of course, is yet another reference to the overwhelming Assyrian forces that were coming to crush them. And I think we see the prophetic past tense here - Assyria had not yet come, but their arrival was so certain that it could be spoken of in the past tense.

And we know that the Assyrian invasion was a judgment sent from God.

2 Kings 17:6-8 - In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. **And this occurred because** the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced.

But what about the end of verse 11? “Because he was determined to go after filth.” What does that mean?

First, we can see that that final phrase is explaining **why** Assyria invaded the northern kingdom.

We just saw one explanation for that event in 2 Kings 17 - Assyria was sent by God as a punishment. And so we should expect this phrase in verse 11 to either be an additional reason for the Assyrian invasion or a re-statement of the reason given in 2 Kings 17.

But, second, we need to once again consider a translation difficulty. Here are some different translations of that final phrase in verse 11.

- because he was determined to go after filth (ESV) - with a footnote giving the alternative “to follow human precepts”
- because he was determined to follow man’s command (NAS)
- [because he was] intent on pursuing idols (NIV)
- because he was determined to go after vanity (NRSV)
- **because he willingly walked after the commandment** (KJV)
- because he was content to walk after man’s command (ASV)
- because he willingly walked after the Decree [of Jeroboam] (Samuel Sharpe 1883)

As we can see, there is a lot of variation in how the final word in that final phrase if verse 11 is translated.

The Hebrew word means commandment or precept, but that Hebrew word is very close to the Hebrew word for “enemy” and also fairly close to the Hebrew word for “idol” and the Hebrew word for “filth.” So, as usual, when the translators can’t make sense of the Hebrew word we have, they start looking for Hebrew words we don’t have (but that are close to the word we do have).

I think the best approach is to consider the word we have (even if the meaning is unclear) rather than to look for words that are close to the word we have but are easier to understand. It is a bit like losing your keys at night beneath your car but looking for them out under the streetlamp where the light is better!

So, with that said, I think the best translation is (surprise!) the KJV - “because he willingly walked after the commandment.”

But that then leaves us with a big question - which commandment?

We know it is not a commandment of God because the problem in verse 11 is that the people **are following** this commandment - not that they are failing to follow it. So what that means is that we need to find a commandment that the people should **not** have been following.

The best explanation I found is that this commandment is a commandment of Assyria.

I think this commandment refers to the commandments that Assyria made to the vassal nations that it oppressed and conquered. The handout for Lesson 23 shows an Assyrian Vassal Treaty in which Assyrian commands were communicated to Assyrian vassal states. I think these are the commands in verse 11 that the people should not have been following.

But we see Ephraim following such Assyrian commandments in 2 Kings 15.

2 Kings 15:19-20 - Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back and did not stay there in the land.

Why did Menahem exact money from Israel to pay Assyria? Because Menahem was following the commandments of Assyria.

And, as we saw on the handout for Lesson 21, this tribute from Menahem was even mentioned by the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser (Pul) on one of his own monuments.

And, yes, Assyria turned back from the land after that money was paid, but those payments were the beginning of the end for Ephraim. They were oppressed, and then later they were crushed because they were determined to be a vassal of Assyria and follow Assyria's requirements - just as verse 11 tells us.

Hosea 5:12

12 But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah.

And the stretch of difficult verses continues!

Some of the strangest descriptions of God anywhere in the Bible are found in the book of Hosea, and here we may see the two strangest descriptions of all. God says, “I am like a moth” and “like dry rot.” What does that mean?

Let’s start with the word “moth.”

The Hebrew word translated “moth” could also be translated as a “maggot” in an open wound or even as “pus” from an open wound. Either way, the focus here is on decay - either decay of fabric eaten by a moth, or decay of a body with an open wound.

Which view makes more sense from the context?

Well, let’s look ahead a bit to the next verse: “When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound.” It seems like the context is decay of the **body** rather than decay of fabric.

I think the NRSV translation may be best here for verse 12: “Therefore I am like maggots to Ephraim, and like rottenness to the house of Judah.” Or perhaps even: “I am like the maggot to Ephraim, and like the gangrene to the house of Judah.”

But let’s pause here and ask a question about Bible translations. Looking at the underlying Hebrew word, and looking at the context, it seems perfectly clear that “moth” is **not** the correct translation in verse 12. The context from verse 13 is sickness and wounds, and so certainly “maggot” is a much better translation in verse 12 than is “moth.”

Why then do so many translations choose “moth”? The ESV, the KJV, the ASV, the NASB, the NIV, the NKJV - they all choose “moth” over “maggot.” Why?

Is it because “maggot” is too shocking? Too crude? Too harsh? Too unexpected? If so, that is a mistake. The Bible does not need our help. The Bible does not need us to make it more respectable, or

less crude, or less shocking. The Bible does not need us to smooth out its edges! God does not need an editor!

We could give more examples of this phenomenon, but instead let's just state the obvious - if God chose the word, then that word is the perfect word! And if that perfect word seems shocking or crude or inappropriate to us, then so be it. I suspect that was precisely why God chose that perfect word! None of us is qualified to be God's editor!

The image in verse 12 is that of a wounded man who is left unattended so that his injuries fester horribly. And such wounded men would have been very familiar to people during times of social unrest and war.

And who is it who did this to them? Who is it who failed to help them? Who is it who failed to clean and bind their wounds?

It is God. God is speaking here. God is like this maggot. God is like this gangrene. And God is like these things to people who were once his own people.

As we said, we see here some of the strangest descriptions of God found anywhere in the Bible. And some of the saddest.

But **when** did this happen? Is this verse pointing to some specific event, or is this just a general description of the sad state to which the people had descended? Let's keep reading.

Hosea 5:13

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

What we see in verse 13 is an example of Ephraim playing the whore. Instead of turning to God for help, Ephraim turns to Assyria.

And the problem with turning to Assyria for help was **not** that Assyria was cruel and oppressive, although Assyria certainly was cruel and oppressive. The problem with turning to Assyria for help was that Assyria was not God! The people would have been wrong to turn to anyone other than God for help.

So, now that we have read verse 13, let's again ask our question about the horrible decaying wounds in verse 12: are they describing some specific event?

We now know that they are **not** describing the final Assyrian invasion in which Israel was removed from the land. Why not? Because verse 13 tells us that these wounds cause the people to turn to Assyria for help. So verse 12 cannot be describing the final invasion by Assyria.

I think the crushing in judgment we saw in verse 11 is that final Assyrian invasion, but I also think that we have now backed up a bit historically in verse 12 to describe events that led up to that Assyrian invasion. But which events are being described in verses 12-13?

Perhaps we should start by determining **when** something like what we see in verse 13 happened - when did Ephraim turn to Assyria for help?

Earlier we talked about the war between Judah and the combined forces of Ephraim and Syria described in Isaiah 7 - but that is **not** what we are looking for here. Why not? Because there it was Judah rather than Ephraim that turned to Assyria for help. What we need is an example where Ephraim turned to Assyria for help.

We have at least two possibilities.

First, in 2 Kings 15, Menahem turned to Assyria for help. And if that is the correct event for verse 13, then the civil war had not yet ended.

2 Kings 15:19 - Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power.

Yes, but that was an invasion by Assyria. Did Menahem ask Assyria for help? Yes he did - as we just read: "that he might **help him** to confirm his hold on the royal power."

And, second, in 2 Kings 17, Hoshea paid tribute to Assyria.

2 Kings 17:3 - Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute.

But there is a problem with that event from the reign of Hoshea - it does not show Hoshea seeking help from Assyria, but rather it shows Assyria oppressing Hoshea.

And, in fact, we know that Hoshea did seek help from a foreign power, but **not** from Assyria. Hoshea sought help from Egypt.

2 Kings 17:4 - But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, **for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt**, ...

So, I think the first possibility is the best answer: verse 13 is referring to Menahem's payment and request for help from Tiglath-pileser in 2 Kings 15:19. And that, of course, would mean that the "great king" in verse 13 is Tiglath-pileser.

Verse 11 ends by talking about the Assyrian vassal relationship, and verse 13 is giving us an example of such a relationship.

And how would that turn out for the people? Verse 13 tells us: "But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound." Assyria would neither cure them nor save them. The people had chosen Assyria over God, and that was a very bad choice.

Earlier we considered whether these events in Hosea 5 occurred before or after the events described in Isaiah 7. Here, I think we see some more evidence that these events occurred **before** the events in Isaiah 7. Why? Because **Judah** ran to Assyria for help in Isaiah 7, and it seems very odd that such an event would not have been mentioned here in verse 13 had it already occurred.

Before we leave verse 13, let's consider another translation issue.

If you look at the ESV translation of verse 13, you will see a footnote next to the phrase "the great king" that provides an alternate translation of "King Jareb." Who is King Jareb? (We will see the same word used again later in Hosea 10:6.)

There was no Assyrian king named Jareb, and we know that the king at this time was Tiglath-pileser. So one possibility is that "Jareb" was a nickname for Tiglath-pileser perhaps meaning "King Contentious" (just as we already know that "Pul" was a nickname for that same king). If Jareb is a nickname, then it is most likely making the point that Tiglath-pileser would prove to be much more of a problem than an ally. Israel had a tiger by the tail!

That is a possibility, but another possibility is that the phrase means “the great king,” as we see in the ESV. That option differs from “King Jareb” only with the pronunciation of the Hebrew letters and not the letters themselves. Also, there is an Assyrian word meaning “great king” that, when translated into Hebrew, has consonants similar to the Hebrew text.

Which is correct? It is hard to say, although we know that God does enjoy giving people nicknames! Ultimately, it doesn't really matter which option we choose because, either way, the phrase is referring to Tiglath-pileser.

Hosea 5:14

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

The Hebrew text of verse 14 strongly emphasizes the pronoun “I,” and we can also see that emphasis in the ESV translation - “I, even I.”

The people were frantically seeking help from everywhere and everyone but God. They looked to Syria, they looked to Assyria, and they looked to Egypt. And, of course, they were also looking to their own false gods and to their own military might. God is reminding them where they should have looked for help with the emphasis here on the pronoun “I” - they should have been seeking help from the great I AM!

But because they did not look to God for help, God will punish them. And again we see a lesson here that we have already seen in this book - the people cannot avoid God forever. God will always have the last word. Their actions will always catch up with them eventually.

The metaphor for God in these verses has now shifted from a flesh-eating decay in verse 12 to a flesh-eating lion here in verse 14.

And perhaps that change suggests we are getting closer and closer to the end. While flesh-eating decay describes a prolonged event, a flesh-eating lion describes a sudden end. As one commentary describes it:

The Israelite states were already in a lengthy state of decay and had suffered ravages of various kinds, but the final conquest would come upon them with the ferocity of a lion.

By why does Ephraim get a lion, while Judah gets only a young lion?

I think that is telling us what we already know - Ephraim would be punished much more severely than Judah. The Assyrians invaded both Ephraim and Judah, but only Ephraim was carried off and scattered. God miraculously spared Jerusalem, but God did not spare Samaria.

Hosea 5:15

15 I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

The lion metaphor continues in verse 15, but it takes an odd twist.

First, the lion returns to his place or his lair, but then - after devouring and carrying off its prey in verse 14 - this lion very unexpectedly gives its prey a second chance in verse 15. I think we can say that this is no ordinary lion!

It is telling that we do not see Ephraim and Judah mentioned separately in verse 15. Instead, we see the collective pronoun "they." After this lion shows up, those distinctions between north and south lose their significance. Suddenly, the people find themselves all in the same boat.

And I think there is a big lesson for us here with that simple change from Ephraim and Judah in verse 14 to "they" in verse 15.

There are many walls and divisions in this world today based on race, nationality, economic status, education, religion, and many other things that seem so important to so many people. But when Jesus - the Lion of Judah - appears again, none of those distinctions will matter.

All that will matter on that great day is whether I am in Christ or out of Christ. When the trumpet sounds, there will be no Ephraim and Judah, but instead the entire world will be reduced to the collective pronoun “they” - we will all be in the same boat, waiting to appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

And who on that day will hear the wonderful words, “Well done, good and faithful servant?” Verse 15 tells us: those who “acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.” And the promise is that those who earnestly seek God - those who seek God first - will find him. Today, such people are those who hear the gospel and obey the gospel.

So where are we at the end of chapter 5?

Starting with the first verse of Hosea 4, we have now seen three subsections of Hosea that remind us of Hosea and Gomer’s three children.

Hosea 4:1-3 reminded us of Gomer’s first child, Jezreel, when we saw the bloodshed in verse 2.

And Hosea 4:4-14 reminded us of Gomer’s third child, Not Mine, when we saw the change from “my people” in verses 6, 8, and 12 to just “a people” in verse 14.

In this third section (Hosea 4:15-5:15), we have been reminded of Gomer’s second child, her daughter, Not Loved.

Why? Two reasons. First, we have seen harsh and violent language describing God’s punishments of the people, and second, we have seen messages for Judah, which reminds us of the surprising message to Judah that we saw in Hosea 1:7 after Not Loved was first introduced.

Combined, these three sections in Hosea 4-5 have laid out the principal charges against Israel.

What happens next? Two things.

First, in Hosea 6:1-3 we will see a call to repentance.

And second, from Hosea 6:4 through the end of Hosea 7 we will see a lament over the stubbornness of the people.

Yes, we will continue to see glimpses of the gospel, but the tone of Hosea will become increasingly dark. Yes, the door for repentance

was open, but there would be no repentance. The book of Hosea is proceeding toward the inevitable end of this stubborn, ignorant, faithless, loveless, rebellious people.

What is the saddest book in the Bible?

We might say Lamentations, but that book is about the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah - and Jerusalem was rebuilt and Judah returned from exile. But not so with Israel.

Israel fell from blinding heights as the chosen people of God to instead be disowned by God and cast away and scattered, never to return. And in Hosea, we see God's final appeal to Israel - an appeal that was once again rejected and thrown back in God's face. I think Hosea may be the saddest book in the Bible.

But despite the sadness, we still see glimpses of the gospel throughout. And so, Hosea is both a very sad book and a very beautiful book.

And not only do we see the gospel of Christ, but we also see Christ in this book.

Where is Jesus in this book? We have already seen references to the coming king, but I think we will also see a reference to the resurrected savior. In fact, I think we will see that very soon! Let's keep reading.

Hosea 6:1-2

1 "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

We know that knowledge is a major theme in Hosea, but so too is repentance. And we see that theme of returning to God here in verse 1.

God wanted his people to return to him. In fact, that is why God sent the prophet Hosea to give them a final warning about what was coming.

In the first three verses of chapter 6, we find a short song about those who return to God and enjoy the great blessings that God has to offer.

And in this short song, we see a reversal of the terrible punishments that we saw in chapter 5. God as a lion had torn them, but now God would heal them. God as gangrene and maggots had infected their wounds, but now God would bind up and bandage their wounds.

Yes, God had punished them, but those punishments had been inflicted for a reason - to wake them up to their true condition so that they would return to him. Even in their punishment, God was seeking their restoration, not their destruction.

But who is singing this song? Who is making this statement in verse 1? Are the people finally waking up? Are they returning to God?

Perhaps a few might have heeded Hosea's warnings, but we know that most did not. We know that most of the people were killed or carried off by Assyria. So who then is singing this song?

I think this short song at the beginning of Hosea 6 is a song that God was longing to hear from his people, but is a song that God did not actually hear from this people. I think that with this beautiful song of repentance, God through Hosea is telling the people what they should have been singing to God. But they were not singing this song. If they had, then God would have turned Assyria around.

If the people had repented, then verse 1 would be telling us what we would expect to see after the punishment in chapter 5 - the lion tears, and God heals; the gangrene infects, and God binds.

But what about verse 2? "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." How do this revival and this raising up in verse 2 fit with what we saw in chapter 5?

Yes, the lion tore its prey and carried off its prey, and perhaps that suggests the lion killed its prey, but we were not told that explicitly in chapter 5. Is there something more going on here in verse 2?

And the answer is yes. There is something more going on here in verse 2 - something much more! Let's listen as the Apostle Paul tells us about it.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 - For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, **that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures**, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Paul tells us that Jesus was raised on the third day **in accordance with the Scriptures**. But where? Where do the Scriptures tell us that?

One possibility might be Jonah 1:17 - "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." And we know that Jesus referred to his own resurrection as the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Matthew 12:39-40 - An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except **the sign of the prophet Jonah**. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be **three days and three nights** in the heart of the earth.

And, yes, Paul may have been thinking about the sign of Jonah in 1 Corinthians 15:4, but I don't think so.

Yes, what happened to Jonah was certainly a **sign** of Jesus' resurrection, but I think Paul's phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures" in 1 Corinthians 15:4 is pointing to something more specific. I think Paul is telling us that the Scriptures somewhere specifically foretold a resurrection of the Messiah on the third day.

And, if so, then the only place in the Old Testament where we find anything like that is right here in Hosea 6:2 - "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."

But if that is correct, then we immediately have at least two questions: (1) Why does the prophecy also talk about two days?, and (2) Isn't the context here about the restoration of Israel - and if so, how can we apply it to Jesus?

Lesson 24

Hosea 6:2 (Continued)

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

When we ended last week, we were looking at verse 2. As we said, it seems most likely that Paul had Hosea 6:2 in mind when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:4 that Jesus “was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

If so, then we have two questions: (1) Why does the prophecy in Hosea 6:2 also talk about two days?, and (2) Isn't the context here about the restoration of Israel - and if so, how can we apply it to Jesus?

Let's start with the reference to two days in verse 2. What does that mean? I think the answer is simple - verse 2 is simply stating the same thing twice.

The phrases “**after** two days” and “on the third day” mean the same thing here. The third day is the day “**after** two days,” and it is on that third day that the raising occurs; it is after two days that the reviving occurs. The raising and the reviving are the same event, and that event happens on the third day, which is the same day as the day after two days.

The word “revive” in verse 2 might make us think we are looking here at someone who is just sick but not someone who is dead - but that is not correct.

We are not looking here at someone who is just sick; we are looking here at someone who is dead. And one way we can see that is by comparing the word we see here with the word we see in Ezekiel 37 with the valley of dry bones.

Ezekiel 37:3 - And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones **live**?”

The Hebrew word translated “live” in that verse is the same Hebrew word translated “revive” in Hosea 6:2. The one who is being revived and raised up here in verse 2 is dead.

And I think that fact also lets us know that the “after two day” revival and the “third day” raising are the same event. It is not possible for someone to be raised from the death slowly or in stages! At any particular moment in time, either someone is alive or is not alive. The revival after two days and the raising on the third day must occur at the same point in time.

Our second question is more controversial: Isn’t the context here about the restoration of Israel - and if so, how can we apply it to Jesus?

That question raises a huge issue in Old Testament studies, so let’s briefly consider an objection that we often hear about prophecies such as Hosea 6:2 (here) and Hosea 11:1 (that we will see later).

And what is that frequent objection? It is the charge that the New Testament writers ripped these Old Testament verses out of their proper context and applied them instead to events from the life of Christ that (the critics tell us) were never in the mind of the original author or the original audience.

Here is how one modern critic describes the position:

It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.

How should we respond to that? Well, let’s start with an example - King David.

When David wrote the Psalms, was David thinking about a coming Messiah, or was David thinking only about himself and the events of his own time? The Bible answers that question!

Acts 2:29–31 - Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and **knowing** that God had sworn

with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 **he foresaw and spoke** about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

David **knew**. David **foresaw**. David **spoke**. Those aren't my words. Those are Peter's words in Acts 2.

And, of course, David is not the only example. We could also point to Isaiah.

John 12:41 - Isaiah said these things because **he saw** his glory and **spoke** of him.

Isaiah **saw** the glory of Christ, and Isaiah **spoke** about Christ.

But, of course, we are not saying that the Old Testament prophets had the complete picture. We know that they did not.

1 Peter 1:10-11 - Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours **searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.**

God did not reveal everything to the prophets, and so the prophets did not know everything. But the very next verse in 1 Peter tells us what those prophets **did** know.

1 Peter 1:12 - **It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you**, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

The prophets knew that they were not speaking only about their own times but were instead also speaking about the coming day of the Messiah. Peter confirms that was revealed to them - "they were serving not themselves but you."

So, the first thing we can say about that common objection is that it is directly refuted by the Scriptures. The prophets knew that they were speaking about the coming Messiah, and, of course, the New

Testament by inspiration very often confirms that fact by quoting Old Testament verses and applying them to Jesus. (Many of the prophecies shown on the handout for Lesson 24 fall in this category.) We cannot believe in the inspiration of the Bible and not also believe that many Old Testament scriptures are about the life of Christ.

But, of course, the same liberal scholars who reject the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament also reject the inspiration of the Bible, so those arguments are not likely to sway them.

Is there anything more we could say to them? Yes, there is. We can make an even stronger statement.

Even if the prophets had no idea what they were speaking about, and even if their audience had no idea what the prophet was speaking about - even then it would still not mean that the prophecies could not be about Jesus.

How do we know? Because we have a prophecy about Jesus that is just like that.

We have a prophecy about Jesus given by someone who had no idea that it was a prophecy about Jesus. We have a prophecy about Jesus that was delivered to an audience who likewise had no idea that it was a prophecy about Jesus. And yet we know with absolute certainty that it was in fact a prophecy about Jesus.

John 11:47-53 - So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." **He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.** So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

Neither Caiaphas nor those listening to Caiaphas thought that Caiaphas was making a prophecy about Jesus. And how do we know that? Because “from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”

Neither the speaker nor the audience saw any prophecy about Jesus in what was said, and yet they were all mistaken.

“He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”

What can we learn from that? What we can learn from that is that God, and God alone, determines whether something is a prophecy about Jesus. Not the speaker, not the hearer, not the context, and not the liberal commentator throwing barbs at the Bible from his air-conditioned ivory tower - but only God and God alone.

And sometimes God gives us those prophecies about his Son in unexpected contexts and from unexpected sources. And sometimes God lets the speaker know that he is prophesying about Jesus, but sometimes he does not.

So what can we conclude from that? What we can conclude is that it makes no sense to argue that a verse in the Old Testament cannot be a prophecy about Jesus because it comes from an unexpected source or in an unexpected context. If God tells us that it is a prophecy about Jesus, then that is what it is.

Now let's get back to our prophecy here: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”

Yes, the context here is the restoration of Israel, and yes, even if that context is unexpected that would not mean this prophecy is not about Jesus - **but is that context really unexpected?** Should we be shocked to see a prophecy about Jesus in a section of Hosea dealing with the restoration of Israel? Not at all!

We have already seen in this book that God had some wonderful things in store for Israel despite their faithlessness and their rebellion.

We have already seen that a time would come when “in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’” (Hosea 1:10)

And we have already seen that those promises of future blessings are the same promises that God makes to all people through the gospel of Christ. God promised to bless the entire world through the Messiah.

Given the terrible disaster that would soon come from Assyria, those promises of future blessing make no sense at all apart from the gospel of Christ.

And so, the context here of the restoration of Israel cannot be separated from the context of Christ. They are the same context, and we see that right here in verses 2 and 3. Had Jesus not been raised on the third day, then there could have been no future blessings for Israel or for anyone else.

So, no, we should not be surprised at all to see a prophecy in Hosea about the resurrection of Christ. Why not? Because the book of Hosea would make no sense at all were it not for the resurrection of Christ. Absent that event, the promises of future blessing in Hosea would be just empty promises.

Yes, Israel would be restored (Jeremiah 31:1-30), but that restoration would occur under the new covenant of Christ (Jeremiah 31:31-40).

So is verse 2 about Jesus? Yes, it most definitely is, and I like how one commentary from 1885 explained it:

The Resurrection of Christ, and our resurrection in Him and in His Resurrection, could not be more plainly foretold. The Prophet expressly mentions two days, after which life should be given, and a third day, on which the resurrection should take place. What else can this be than the two days in which the Body of Christ lay in the tomb, and the third day, on which He rose again, as the Resurrection and the life, the first fruits of them that slept, the source and earnest and pledge of our resurrection and of life eternal?

And further:

In shadow, the prophecy was never fulfilled to Israel at all. The ten tribes were never restored; they never, as a whole, received any favor from God, after He gave them up to captivity. ... The strictest explanation is the truest. The two days and the third day have nothing in history to correspond with them, except that in which they were fulfilled, when Christ, “rising on the third day from the grave, raised with Him the whole human race.”

I think that final comment explains the plural pronouns that we see here in verse 2: “After two days he will revive **us**; on the third day he will raise **us** up, that **we** may live before him.”

The resurrection of Christ is our resurrection as well.

John 11:25 - Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”

Romans 6:5 - For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

1 Peter 3:21 - Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hosea 6:3

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

The wonderful song of repentance that started in verse 1 ends here in verse 3.

And verse 3 begins with a restatement of one of the primary themes of this book: “Let us **know**; let us press on to **know** the LORD.”

And that motto is a wonderful motto for the people of God at any time in history!

“His going out is sure as the dawn.” We can depend on God just as surely as we can depend on the sun to rise each day. And the coming of the Lord will be a time of joy and light, just as the dawn brings joy and light following a night time of darkness.

Earlier we saw darkness consuming the land, but here we see light consuming the darkness.

And we also saw a drought earlier, but here we see showers and spring rains from God watering the earth. It is God, not Baal, who controls the rain and who blesses the world with life and fertility.

The terrors of the lion, disease, decay, darkness, and drought are replaced with healing, the binding of wounds, the light of dawn, and the blessing of rain.

As we said, this is the song that God longed to hear from his people, but God did not hear this song from them.

This song tells us what God wanted to do for Israel, but Israel wanted nothing to do with God.

And it is to that sad fact that Hosea turns in the next verse.

But before we get to verse 4, let’s pause and note something wonderful about what God tells us here.

If God had ever thrown up his hands and said that the sinful people on this world were not worth the life of his Son, this would have been that time. Despite all that God had done for Israel, they had repeatedly thrown those blessings back in God’s face and had instead embraced Baal. Rather than thanking God for those blessings and worshiping God, they had thanked and worshipped Baal. They did not know God. They were faithless.

And yet what do we see God doing here at the beginning of Hosea 6? We see God planning to send his Son to die for this world and then be resurrected on the third day. What we see here is the same thing that Paul would later tell us about.

Romans 5:8 - But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Can we ever fully understand the love of God? I don’t think so, but Hosea 6:1-3 is a good place to start.

Hosea 6:4

4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.

Verse 4 begins with what can be described only as a cry of anguish from God: “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?”

What shall I do? What shall I do? It is a cry of love, but also a cry of frustration.

It is the cry of a parent or of a spouse who has tried everything and who now wonders if there is anything left to try. Or perhaps it is the cry of someone who knows what must be done next, but who really does not want to take that final step.

In that cry we see both the great love and the great sadness of this book. What can I do? What can I do? What can be done to change someone’s heart. It is a cry that we still hear today.

God’s love is unwavering - but not so with the love of Israel. God says: “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.”

The people depended on predictable rainfall for their livelihood, and so they would have immediately understood the figures in this verse of a morning cloud that looks like rain but proves to be disappointing and of morning dew that promises moisture but that quickly evaporates.

The morning clouds and the morning dew are fleeting - and so is the love of Israel toward God. Israel’s love is wavering and unsteady and inconsistent - all the opposite of God’s love for them.

One day the people act like they want to follow God, but the next day they are worshiping Baal and they are looking to foreign nations for help. Their commitments to God mean nothing; they are disloyal and unfaithful.

Hosea 6:5

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

In verse 4 we saw God rhetorically asking what he could do to get through to this rebellious people. Here in verse 5 we see what God did - God sent forth his prophets, God sent forth his word, and God sent forth his judgment.

Verse 5 is not describing the actual punishments, but rather verse 5 is describing the prophetic pronouncements of the actual punishments. These people are not being struck down by soldiers and slain by arrows - they are being struck down by prophets and slain by words.

Verse 5 is a remarkable testament to both the certainty of God's word and the power of God's word. Whether you are slain by an Assyrian arrow or by God's promise of an Assyrian arrow - you are just as dead either way.

If God tells us that something will happen, then that something becomes a certainty - so much so that the promise of the event and the event itself become effectively interchangeable. That is what we see here with people who are hewn not by soldiers but by prophets and who are slain not by arrows but by words.

And who were these prophets? Hosea is certainly included, but so are Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and many others. The prophets had all told the people what would happen if they rejected God.

As for God's judgment, verse 5 tells us it goes forth as the light. What does that mean? It means that God's judgments cut through the darkness; they uncover the darkness; they shine in the darkness.

Elsewhere in Hosea we have seen the darkness that comes when people do not know God, when they do not teach their children about God, and when they engage in idolatry, sexual immorality, and drunkenness.

We have seen the darkness that comes when people play the whore and when they place their trust in their false gods, in their foreign alliances, and in their own military power.

But God's judgments are just the opposite - they go forth as light!

1 John 1:5 - This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

John 3:19 - And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Verse 5 is directed to both Ephraim and Judah. Both had been warned, and both would soon experience the promised judgment from God. That judgment was coming very soon for Ephraim with the Assyrian invasion, and it would come later for Judah with the Babylonian invasion.

Hosea 6:6

6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6 is one of the great texts of the Bible. Let's begin our study of this verse by looking at how Jesus used it.

Matthew 9:9-13 - As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: **'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'** For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 12:1-8 - At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, '**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,**' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

I think we also see an allusion to Hosea 6:6 in Mark 12, not from the words of Christ but from the words of a scribe who answered Jesus wisely.

Mark 12:28-34 - And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, **is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.**" And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

There is a great deal we can say about those verses, and quite a lot that we will say about them - but let's start with a simple yet wonderful fact: Jesus read and studied the very same verses that we are reading and studying in this class!

Jesus knew the Scriptures - and yes, we know that Jesus is all-knowing, but we also know that Jesus grew up studying the Scriptures.

Luke 2:52 - And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

So, yes, Jesus studied Hosea, and, based on what we just read, perhaps we can say even more - perhaps we can say that Hosea 6:6 was Jesus' favorite verse in Hosea!

So, with that background, what does verse 6 mean?

Let's start with what it meant to those who first heard it.

"I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

What have we already seen several times about the people of Israel in Hosea's day? What we have seen is that, although they had turned their back on God, they had not turned their back on the rituals of God. We saw that most clearly in Hosea 2.

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

They were just going through the motions, but their hearts were about as far from God as it was possible for them to be. They kept the Sabbath and the appointed feasts, but they did so in honor of Baal and for the purpose of sexual immorality. And, yes, Israel made burnt offerings, but they did so for Baal!

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

So no one - not Hosea, not Israel, and not us - should be surprised when God tells us in verse 6 that he desires steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

God did not then - and God does not now - want people that just go through the motions. God wants people who know him and who love him. That is what verse 6 is telling us, and, again, that message should not come as a surprise to anyone.

So now, let's fast forward seven centuries from the days of Hosea to the days of Christ. And what God said in Hosea 6:6 was still true.

In Matthew 9, Jesus was confronted by Pharisees who asked him why he was eating with tax collectors and sinners. And Jesus, quoting Hosea 6:6, said:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

In Matthew 12, Jesus was once again confronted by Pharisees who accused his disciples of breaking the Sabbath when they plucked heads of grain and ate. And Jesus, quoting Hosea 6:6, said:

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

What do those two events have in common?

- Each of them is an example where the Pharisees placed form over substance.
- Each of them is an example where the Pharisees missed the big picture.
- Each of them is an example where the Pharisees displayed their hypocrisy.
- Each of them is an example where the Pharisees were just going through the motions with no thought of God.

- Each of them is an example where the Pharisees shows their lack of knowledge, their lack of faithfulness, and their lack of steadfast love.

And when faced with such people, Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6.

So now, let's fast forward again - this time let's move forward 27 centuries from the days of Hosea and 20 centuries from the days of Christ to our own days. And, again, what God said in Hosea 6:6 is still true.

Can we sum up the message of Hosea in a single statement? What is the most valuable lesson that I, living in 2024, can learn from the prophet Hosea, who lived 27 centuries ago? I think Hosea 6:6 gives us that answer.

What is the message of Hosea? What is the most valuable lesson I can learn from Hosea? I think it is this: **God does not want a people who just go through the motions. God wants a people who know him and who love him.**

So what does that mean for me? What it means is that if I am just going through the motions, then I have a big problem. In fact, I have the same problem that the people of Israel had in the days of Hosea!

I might be tempted to read Hosea and say to God, like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, "I thank you that I am not like these other men." But if I am just going through the motions, then I am exactly like these other men!

Why am I here today? Why am I singing? Why am I praying? Why am I taking the communion? Why am I giving? Why am I listening to God's word? **Is it all just to get my ticket punched?**

Have I left God, but kept the rituals of God? If so, I would hardly be the first to have done so! The people of Hosea's day had done the exact same thing.

Yes, God wants me to worship him according to the pattern that he has given us in his word, but God wants those acts of worship to be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

Absent the right heart, my acts of worship are not acts of worship. I cannot worship God as God wants to be worshipped if I do not know God and love God.

That is certainly the message of Hosea 6:6, and it may be the message of the entire book.

Lesson 25

Hosea 6:6 (Continued)

6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Before we look at verse 7, let's consider one more point about Hosea 6:6.

As we recall from last week, Hosea 6:6 is one of the great texts of the Bible. It is a verse that Jesus quoted at least twice in responding to charges made by the Pharisees.

But is that verse in Hosea itself a quote from someone else? Yes, or at least it is very close to being a quotation. And the source of that quote shows us that the problem described in Hosea 6:6 was a problem that existed from the first king of Israel up until the last kings of Israel.

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul was commanded by God to “go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have” (verse 3). But (as we recall from our earlier study of Esther involving Haman the Agagite) Saul disobeyed that command.

1 Samuel 15:9 - But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.

And when Samuel showed up to confront King Saul, here is what Samuel said:

1 Samuel 15:22 - And Samuel said, “**Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?** Behold, to

obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”

It is instructive to compare what Samuel said with what we read here in Hosea:

- (Hosea) “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the **knowledge** of God rather than burnt offerings.”
- (Samuel) “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in **obeying** the voice of the LORD?”

As we have found, knowledge is a major theme in the book of Hosea. But that knowledge is not just an academic knowledge. There is a huge difference between knowing God and just knowing **about** God. And I think we see that difference here.

What God wants in Hosea is **knowledge**, and what God wants in 1 Samuel is **obedience**. Those are **not** two separate things. The knowledge of God that God desires includes the obedience of God that God desires.

Why did King Saul disobey the command of God? Because King Saul did not know God as he should have. I think we see Saul’s lack of knowledge in what Samuel said to King Saul after a prior act of disobedience.

1 Samuel 13:14 - But now your kingdom shall not continue. **The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart**, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

King David, unlike King Saul, was a man after God’s own heart. King David had the knowledge of God that King Saul lacked.

And I think there is one more verse from 1 Samuel that really drives this point home.

1 Samuel 2:3 - For the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

In that one verse we see both knowledge and obedience. God is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. We cannot separate knowledge and obedience. If we know God as God desires to be known, then we will obey God as God desires to be obeyed.

And if we do not obey God, then we do not know God.

1 John 2:3-4 - And by this **we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.** Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Hosea 6:7

7 But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

“But like Adam **they** transgressed the covenant.” Who are **they**?

If we back up to verse 4, then it seems that Ephraim and Judah are still being discussed.

But if we look ahead to verse 9, we see another possibility - verse 7 may be describing a gang of priests.

So which is it? Let’s hold off on that question until we get to verse 9.

For now we can say that either Ephraim and Judah from verse 4 or the priests that we will meet in verse 9 are said here in verse 7 to be like Adam. What does that mean?

Question: Outside of Genesis, how many times is Adam *discussed* in the Old Testament?

And the answer is...either never or once, depending on what we decide about Hosea 6:7.

Adam is *mentioned*, but not discussed, in one Old Testament verse outside of Genesis - his name is the first word of First Chronicles, where he leads off the genealogy of Abraham. But Adam is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament outside of Genesis other than possibly for here in Hosea 6:7.

The New Testament, of course, has quite a bit to say about Adam, but such is not true of the Old Testament (outside of Genesis). Given the importance of Adam, we might expect the prophets (or maybe the Psalmist) to have discussed Adam more frequently (or ever!) - but Hosea 6:7 **may be** the only example.

Why do I say “**may be** the only example”? Because it is possible that Hosea 6:7 has nothing at all to say about the patriarch Adam.

Once again, we have a translation issue. Here are three translations of Hosea 6:7.

- (ESV) But **like Adam** they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.
- (KJV) But they **like men** have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.
- (NRSV) But **at Adam** they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

So which is correct? Is Adam a person, a people, or a place? Let's start by looking at each of the various possibilities that have been proposed.

First, Adam could be Adam, the first man, as the ESV suggests.

Those who reject this view point to the word “there” in the second half of verse 7, which, they say, means that Adam must be a place rather than a person. They also note that Gilead in verse 8 and Shechem in verse 9 are places, which, they say, suggests that Adam is also a place.

But the word “there” in verse 7 could be pointing forward to Gilead in verse 8 rather than pointing back to Adam. And there is no rule that Hosea could not have referred to both people and places as examples.

But did Adam the patriarch transgress a covenant? Yes, he did, if we define a covenant as a relationship that involves obligations.

Genesis 2:15-17 - The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You

may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

That’s a covenant. Adam, the first man, transgressed that first covenant - and in that sense he is like Ephraim and Judah, because they are also guilty of violating their covenant with God.

Second, Adam could be a city by that name located on the Jordan river.

Joshua 3:14-16 - So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, **at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan**, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho.

The handout for Lesson 25 shows the location of Adam, and also includes an inscription from the reign of Pharaoh Shishak in which he claims to have captured the city of Adam during his incursion into Israel and Judah, which is mentioned in 1 Kings 14:25-26.

Joshua 3 says that Adam is beside Zarethan. Zarethan is usually identified either with a tell that is about twelve miles further north, or with a tell that is on the north side of the Jabbok River. (A tell is a mound formed by the remains of an ancient city.)

This view of the word “Adam” as an ancient city in verse 7 amends the text slightly so that, instead of being “**like** Adam,” the text would read “**at** Adam,” which is almost identical in the Hebrew. But, as one commentary, explains:

There is no textual basis for this change, which seems to rob the verse of a powerful comparison ..., but it must be admitted that the next line, ‘there they dealt faithlessly

with me', is hard to account for if no place has yet been mentioned.

Choosing Adam the city over Adam the person does explain the word "there" in verse 7 and does fit nicely with the other two cities that are mentioned, but it does not explain **why** Adam the city is mentioned here.

There is nothing in the Bible about the people from the city of Adam having transgressed a covenant - or, for that matter, having done anything! But, with that said, there is an intriguing possibility about Adam the city that we will consider when we get to the next two verses.

Third, we could change the word "Adam" in verse 7 to instead be "Admah."

Admah was city on the plain that was destroyed by God along with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 10:19 and Genesis 19:29. In fact, we will see Admah mentioned later in Hosea 11:8. But there is really no basis for changing the word "Adam" in verse 7 to Admah.

Fourth, we could take Adam to refer generally to men, as in the KJV.

The first problem with this view is that I could not find a single commentary that interprets the underlying Hebrew this way.

And a second problem is that it leaves us wondering **which** men are being discussed. In effect, this approach has the verse saying that "they" are like "them," which seems a bit too obscure even for Hosea!

So which is it?

I think we should reject the third and fourth possibility in favor of either the first or second. That means we must choose between a **person** named Adam and a **city** named Adam.

Or must we? Remember that Hosea seems to enjoy a good pun every now and then. Hosea might be using the name Adam to mean **both** the person and the place. Perhaps Hosea is saying: "Like Adam (the man) they break covenants; they are faithless to me there (in the town of Adam)." After all, it seems likely that Adam the place

was named after Adam the person, so perhaps Hosea is making a pun using the city's name.

If that is not what Hosea is doing here, then either the person or the place could be correct, but I lean toward Adam the **place** given what we will see next in verses 8-9. So let's look at those verses and then circle back to our question about verse 7.

Hosea 6:8-9

8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. 9
As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together; they murder on the way to Shechem; they commit villainy.

What is going on here? Verse 7 seemed like a general statement, but verses 8-9 suddenly sound much more specific. Tracked with blood? Like robbers in wait? Priests banding together? Murder on the way to Shechem?

Are we missing something? Does Hosea have some specific villainous event in mind here? Perhaps he does.

And, as we said, the answer to this question may help us decide which way to jump when it comes to the identity of Adam in verse 7.

To begin, let's start with what we see here about Gilead and Shechem.

And the first thing we see about Gilead is something odd - verse 8 refers to Gilead as a **city**. But Gilead was a region or a district rather than a city. (You can see the region of Gilead shown on the map from Lesson 19.)

But the word "Gilead" does occur in city names. Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead are both cities in Gilead. (Jabesh-Gilead is shown on the map from Lesson 21.)

Adam is also a city in Gilead, and perhaps it was known at the time as Adam-Gilead. And if so, then perhaps the name Adam-Gilead is broken up in verses 7 and 8, so that Adam-Gilead is both the city

that transgressed the covenant in verse 7 and the city of evildoers in verse 8.

That proposal would explain the meaning of Adam in verse 7, and would also explain why Gilead is called a city in verse 8.

But what happened at Adam? Who are these evildoers, and who did they murder?

We have another clue in verse 9 - whatever happened did not happen in Shechem, but rather happened **on the way to** Shechem. And again, that **specificity** in location makes us think that Hosea is describing a **specific** crime.

And whatever happened on the road to Shechem may have occurred on the east-west road to Shechem that crosses the Jordan **at the city of Adam**.

If we look for the identity of the evildoers in verse 8, the most likely candidate is the gang of priests in verse 9. And perhaps, as we said earlier, this gang of priests is the villain, not only in verse 9, but also in verses 7-8.

But whom did they kill?

One commentary suggests it was likely “a momentous event in which priests collaborated in a conspiracy, perhaps against the royal family.”

Another says:

[The description here] indicates that this was no ordinary murder. It was a serious breach of covenant, involving deception, wickedness, and treachery and adding up to the worst possible crime.

And another says:

For all of their obscurity to modern readers, the comparisons to Israel’s folly in Hosea 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.

I think Hosea is most likely describing here some terrible event that all of his listeners already knew about but that was not otherwise recorded in the Bible, which is why we now can only speculate about what happened.

But even without knowing of what happened, we can see here from Hosea's description the depths of depravity to which these priests had fallen. They were nothing more than robbers and murderers.

So now let's briefly go back to our question about verse 7 - who or what is Adam?

Again, it could be Adam the man, but I favor Adam the city, and I think verses 7-9 are together describing some terrible bloody crime that was perpetrated by a murderous gang of priests in that specific city.

One more point about verse 8 is that the phrase "tracked with blood" is particularly interesting. Literally it is "footprints of blood," and the root word in Hebrew for "footprints" is also the root word of the name "Jacob."

And the phrase "city of evildoers" uses the Hebrew word "aven," which is the same word that Hosea previously used to coin the nickname Beth-aven for Bethel. Why is that important here? Because Bethel is also closely associated with Jacob.

It seems that the text of Hosea is deliberately working Jacob into this prophecy. Why? What is the point? One commentary suggests an answer:

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."

If that is correct - that Hosea is intentionally referring indirectly to Jacob the person - then that may strengthen the view that the word

“Adam” in verse 7 is being used to refer to **both** Adam the person and to Adam’s namesake city.

Hosea 6:10-11

10 In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim’s whoredom is there; Israel is defiled. 11 For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed, when I restore the fortunes of my people.

One commentary begins its comments on these two verses by saying: “All scholars agree that [the second half of verse 11] belongs with 7:1.” And perhaps that is true, but it likely depends on how that commentator defines the word “scholar.”

But I agree that the final phrase in verse 11 does seem to make more sense with the first verse of chapter 7 than it does with the final verse of chapter 6. Looking ahead a bit into chapter 7, I think the NRSV is better than the ESV:

Hosea 6:10 - 7:1 (NRSV) - In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim’s whoredom is there, Israel is defiled. For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed. *[NEW PARAGRAPH]* When I would restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria.

So, taking that approach, we will save our comments on that final phrase in verse 11 until we get to the first verse of chapter 7.

“In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing.”

What is the “house of Israel”?

That is a question we considered earlier when we saw that same phrase at the beginning of chapter 5.

Hosea 5:1 - Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, **O house of Israel!** Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.

The focus there was on the **leadership** of the people, and so we suggested there that the “house of Israel” referred to the wealthy landed-owning people who were *de facto* leaders of the people because of their prominence, influence, and wealth. And I still think that view makes the most sense in Hosea 5:1.

But what about here in Hosea 6:10 where we see the same phrase? Does it mean the same thing here?

Our general approach should be that the same phrase means the same thing, but that is not always the case with a general phrase such as this. The context might cause us to come up with another meaning here.

I think we have two choices. Either the “house of Israel” in Hosea 6:10 means the same thing it meant in Hosea 5:1, or the “house of Israel” in Hosea 6:10 is referring to the entire northern kingdom - both Ephraim and Israel.

If the meaning is unchanged, then I think Hosea is telling us something here that we likely would have suspected anyway - that the whoredom and the defilement in the land was being spread primarily by the wealthy land-owning people in the land.

They had the money and the land required to build the false shrines, and they had the economic interests driving them to look to false gods for an improved harvest. I lean toward this view.

But the simpler view also has some appeal. The “house of Israel” might be used here as an umbrella term that includes Israel and Ephraim, both of which are also mentioned in that same verse.

But if that view is correct, then that phrase has two different meanings in the two verses. Why? Because, as we said, the house of Israel in Hosea 5:1 sets a snare and spreads a net, and that would not make sense for the entire nation of Israel. If everyone is included, then who is being caught in the snare and in the net? Back in Hosea 5:1 it was the leaders who did those things.

Either way, what God tells us is that in this “house of Israel” he has seen a “horrible” thing. What does that mean?

The Hebrew word translated “horrible thing” is found four times in the Bible - once here and three times in Jeremiah. The Hebrew word

refers to something that is rotten and disgusting. Jeremiah 29:17 uses a related word to describe rotten figs.

What is it that God sees that is so disgusting and rotten? Why is God holding his nose? It is the whoredom of Ephraim and the defilement of Israel.

“Ephraim’s whoredom is there; Israel is defiled.”

Where is “**there**”?

Most likely it is the “house of Israel,” but others suggests it is Shechem or Adam. I think the most likely antecedent is the closest option, which is the house of Israel. And, if so, that confirms what we said earlier - that the house of Israel is the wealthy land-owners in which the whoredom with false gods and false alliances was centered. They had the greatest motive to look to those sources for better harvests and for protection of their wealth.

And what is there? What is in the house of Israel?

Whoredom and defilement - the same two things that we have been seeing over and over again ever since chapter 1 when we first met Gomer.

Hosea knew exactly what it was like to look at your wife and see someone who was caught up in whoredom and defilement. That is also what God saw when he looked at his wife - the people of Israel.

And how had they played the whore? By rejecting God, their true husband, in favor of their false gods and their foreign alliances.

And why were they defiled? Because of their faithlessness and because of their sexual immorality and drunkenness.

And, of course, just because Ephraim is called out here for playing the whore and Israel is called out for being defiled does not mean that Israel had not also played the whore or that Ephraim was not also defiled. We know from other verses that both Ephraim and Israel had played the whore and that both were defiled.

But with that said, I think perhaps we can say that Ephraim was worse, and perhaps we see that fact here with Ephraim being mentioned first. And why was Ephraim worse? Remember who their king was - King Menahem. And what was he like?

2 Kings 15:16 - At that time Menahem sacked Tiphshah and all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on, because they did not open it to him. Therefore he sacked it, **and he ripped open all the women in it who were pregnant.**

So perhaps Ephraim was worse, but we know that Israel was not very far behind.

But what about Judah?

“For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.”

As we have now seen many times, Judah is mentioned briefly here after Israel and Ephraim are described.

Hosea’s primary message is aimed at the north and is delivered to the north, but there are also some messages here for the south. Judah was following in the footsteps of Israel and Ephraim, and so we see frequent warnings here for Judah not to follow their bad example.

“You, too, Judah!” That short phrase at the beginning of verse 11 lets us know that Judah is being accused here of the same sins as Israel and Ephraim. Perhaps the sins were not yet as bad, but they were there, and, of course, we know Judah also descended into apostasy and was eventually carried off by Babylon.

But what about that final phrase: “a harvest is appointed.” What does that mean, and is it good or bad?

As for a harvest being good or bad, it can be either good or bad depending on the context. Later we will see an example of this in Hosea:

Hosea 10:12-13 - Sow for yourselves righteousness; **reap steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you. You have plowed iniquity; **you have reaped injustice**; you have eaten the fruit of lies.

Reaping steadfast love? That’s a good harvest. Reaping injustice? That’s a bad harvest. So we need to look at the context.

What is the context here? The context here is sin - it is whoredom and defilement. We should **not** be expecting a good harvest in verse

11. Whatever harvest is appointed for Judah, it is a harvest that comes about because Judah is sharing in the same sins as her sisters, Israel and Ephraim.

I think the harvest here is the harvest of **judgment**. Yes, this harvest would be done by God, but God would use the Assyrians to harvest Ephraim and Israel, and God would use Babylon to harvest Judah. Assyria and Babylon were sickles in the hand of God, and Assyria and Babylon would arrive at their appointed times.

As we said, the final phrase in chapter 6 really belongs at the beginning of chapter 7, so we will include it with Hosea 7:1.

Hosea 7:1

[6:10*b* When I restore the fortunes of my people.] 1 When I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely; the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside.

Again, we are reminded of what God wanted to do - what God longed to do - to restore the fortunes of his people and to heal his people. But his people were evil, and so they did not receive these blessings from God.

The phrase at the end of chapter 6 literally reads: “I will bring my people back from captivity.” But we should not read that language narrowly to apply only to captivity or exile by a foreign nation. Instead, the phrase used here can simply mean captivity by sin - by the evil deeds that are mentioned here. Those deeds were holding the people captive and away from God, as God says in these verses.

What does it mean when God says, “When I would heal **Israel**, the iniquity of **Ephraim** is revealed”?

Israel can have broad or narrow meanings depending on its context.

- At its most narrow meaning, Israel can refer to a single person - Jacob.
- At its broadest meaning, Israel can refer to all Jews from all tribes.

- But Israel can also refer to all of the northern tribes after the division of the kingdom.
- And, as we have already seen in Hosea, Israel can refer to only the anti-Assyrian faction of the northern kingdom (as opposed to the pro-Assyrian faction, Ephraim).

What is the meaning here? I think Israel is most likely being used here as a synonym for the phrase “my people” at the end of chapter 6. That is, I think Israel is being used here to denote all of the people in the north.

And why do I think that? Because it appears in verse 1 that Ephraim is a subset of Israel. God wanted to heal Israel, but there was iniquity in Ephraim and evil deeds in Samaria. That would not seem to make sense if Ephraim and Samaria were not considered a part of Israel in verse 1.

Elsewhere we see Ephraim and Israel treated as separate kingdoms, but here I think we see Israel being used as an umbrella term for the entire northern kingdom.

Samaria, of course, was the capital of Ephraim during the 12 year civil war and was the capital of Israel (the entire northern kingdom) at other times.

What is the iniquity of Ephraim? What are the evil deeds of Samaria? I like how one commentary answers that question:

“Crime is rampant in society. People cheat one another, thieves burglarize, and gangs mug people in the streets (one wonders whether Hosea is here speaking of ancient Israel or modern America).”

And we are reminded in verse 1 of the catalog of sins that we saw back in chapter 4.

Hosea 4:2 - There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

In short, verse 1 is telling us that society was breaking down because of sin. The people were all lying to each other and stealing from each other, and no society can endure that for very long.

Hosea 7:2

2 But they do not consider that I remember all their evil.
Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.

I doubt that this will come as much of a surprise to anyone, but one of my favorite authors is J.R.R. Tolkien. And his book *The Hobbit* is the source of one of my favorite quotes:

“It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.”

And I think God says something very similar here about himself! It does not do to leave God out of our calculations!

I might think I have pulled the wool over God’s eyes. I may think that God doesn’t know what I am doing. I might think that God is far away and that he either doesn’t know or doesn’t care what I am up to. But I would be completely wrong.

Yes, knowledge is a central theme of Hosea, but that knowledge runs both ways. In one way, I must know God. But a message of Hosea is that God also knows me. God knows!

Luke 8:17 - For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

Hebrews 4:13 - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

But the people in Hosea 7:2 did not understand that. “They do not consider that I remember all their evil.” They did not include God in their calculations. They did not understand that God knew all that they had done and all that they were plotting. And they did not understand that God will always have the last word.

Lesson 26

Hosea 7:2 (Continued)

2 But they do not consider that I remember all their evil.
Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.

When we ended last week, we were about to look at the second half of verse 2.

“Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face.”

Not only did God know all of their evil deeds, but those evil deeds were right before God’s face. I think there is a dual meaning there.

First, that those deeds were before God’s face is a reminder that God knew what they were doing and that God cared about what they were doing.

But second, that those evil deeds were before God’s face is a reminder that those sins had been committed openly for all to see.

The people were not ashamed of what they had done. They were not trying to hide themselves from God in the garden. Instead, they were doing these things out in the open right in front of God’s face and everyone else’s face as well.

“Now their deeds surround them.”

The word used there is often used to describe an army besieging a city. These sins were surrounding and engulfing the people, and, like an invading army, their sins would overcome them and destroy them.

They may soon have thought that they were surrounded by Assyrians, but actually they were surrounded by their own sins. They had brought this disaster down upon their own heads.

Hosea 7:3

3 By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes
by their treachery.

If you are like me, you are looking forward to the part of Hosea where everything stops being so difficult - where we can leave all of those translation difficulties behind, and we can enjoy some smooth sailing for a while. We are not there yet, and I'm starting to doubt we will ever find that in Hosea.

Here is how one commentary opens its discussion of Hosea 7:3-7.

This is without question among the most vexing texts in the Hebrew Bible. The language is extremely obscure, and even its main point is not entirely clear.

So, with that as our challenge, let's get started!

“By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.”

That reference to a king and to princes gives us a theme of these difficult verses - they appear to be focused on the intrigues of court life in the palace of a king. Verses 3, 5, and 7 all refer to kings, rulers, or princes.

In verse 1, we found ourselves in Samaria. Now, here in verse 3, we find ourselves inside the palace. (An excavated wall from the palace in Samaria is shown on the handout for Lesson 26.)

What about verses 4 and 6? As we will soon see, those two verses give us the other main theme of this difficult section - bakers and ovens! But let's hold off on that theme until we get to the next verse.

So back to verse 3 - “by their evil they make the king glad.” **Whose** evil and **what** evil?

We have some clues in the text.

First, whoever they are, it seems from verse 7 that they will play a role in the eventual fall of this king. They are making the king glad here in verse 3, but in verse 7 they will be devouring their rulers.

Second, whoever they are, they appear to have access to the king. We are not looking at ordinary people here - ordinary people could not

gladden the king for the simple reason that the king knew nothing about them and cared nothing for them.

And third, whoever they are, we will see in verse 6 that they do their work with intrigue.

So, putting those clues together, I think the people making the king glad in verse 3 are most likely the members of his royal court.

This royal court would have included priests and military officers. These palace officials had the ear of the king and were in a position to topple that king through intrigue and power plays. And perhaps the priests alone are the plotters here given the gang of priests we saw earlier in Hosea 6:9.

And the land must have been filled with such people! As we said in our introductory overview, following the death of Jeroboam, the northern kingdom very quickly had four more kings, two assassinations, and a civil war! If we include Jeroboam himself, then the people had five kings within about a year's time! There must have been a great deal of plotting and intrigue going on.

But how do they make the king **glad** by their evil? And how do they make the princes **glad** by their treachery?

I think that is where the intrigue from verse 6 will come in. They make the king glad by joining in with the king in his debaucheries, but that also serves to get them close to the king so that they can plot against him.

And likewise, they flatter the princes to make them glad, but that flattery is really treachery because it allows them to gain the confidence of the royal family and keep themselves free from suspicion. "These flatterers are my best friends! How could they ever be plotting against me?"

One thing that will really shine through in these verses is that they are not very complimentary of the king! The words "clueless," "corrupt," and "indolent" come to mind as we read about the king in these verses.

One thing we know for sure about the king's gladness in verse 3 is that it does not last very long. This king will have fallen by the time we get to verse 7.

And that context confirms our view about verse 3 - that although this king is made glad here, he should not have been glad at all because his court officials were plotting against him. They were making him glad just to distract him from what was really going on.

Hosea 7:4

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

“**They** are all adulterers.” Who are **they**?

We have three choices. Either it is the court officials in the palace of the king, or it is the king himself along with his princes, or it is all of the above.

I suspect all of the above were adulterers. But I think the focus here is on the court officials. Why? Because of what we will see in the second half of this verse.

But before we get there, let's ask another question: why the focus here on adultery? Back in verse 1 it seemed like the major problems were lying and stealing. Why do we suddenly see adultery here in verse 4?

The answer is that spiritual adultery is a major theme, and perhaps the major theme, of the book of Hosea. We saw **literal** adultery with Gomer, and then we saw **spiritual** adultery with Israel and Ephraim.

And where did that adultery originate? Right at the top. Right from the palace of the king. And I suspect that was true of both the literal adultery and the spiritual adultery.

We see that same theme in Jeremiah. There the adulterers were so bad that they made God wish he had a vacation home where he could go to get away from them!

Jeremiah 9:2 - Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men.

Political adultery could also be in view here by those who were unfaithful to the king. Their loyalties were with someone else.

And, as we said before, in verse 4 we see another theme of this difficult section - bakers and ovens!

But these are not literal bakers and literal ovens. Instead, these bakers and ovens are being used here as an illustration for adultery. And we see such illustrations elsewhere.

Proverbs 6:27-29 - Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.

The oven of a baker would have been much larger than an ordinary oven in someone's home, and particularly so for the king's baker. But the picture here is not of a hot oven baking bread. The picture instead is of a baker who quits stirring the fire and who quits kneading the dough.

So what can we say about such a baker? What we can say is that this baker is notable, not for what he is doing, but for what he is not doing. He is **not** stirring the fire, and he is **not** kneading the dough.

Earlier we said that the focus in verse 4 is likely on the court officials. Why? Because they are being compared to the neglected oven of this inactive baker.

I think this baker is the king, and the adulterous officials plotting against the king are illustrated by the baker's heated oven.

And the king is clueless. The king is not doing the things a baker should be doing. He is not tending his oven, and he is not tending the bread. In short, this king did not know what those priests were cooking up!

And while the king is asleep, those plots are rising just like this dough. And, while the king sleeps, the evil in the land is also rising just like this dough. This is a king who does nothing while evil (like leaven) spreads through society and through his court.

Hosea 7:5

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

The “day of our king” in verse 5 just means in the day time. In verse 6, we will see what happens at night and in the morning.

So what happens in the day time? What happens is that the princes (and presumably the king as well) spend the day drinking until they become sick from the wine.

I think we are intended to see here a royal family that is being kept drunk and diverted so that they are unable to recognize the plots that are forming all around them.

The phrase “he stretched out his hand with mockers” is better translated as “his hand draws mockers.”

Sometimes a leader will surround himself with the very best people he can find, but very often a leader will surround himself with the very worst people he can find. That is what this king is doing here. And these mockers will soon be his undoing.

Proverbs 29:12 - If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.

What are we seeing in these verses? What we are seeing is a description of a political world that has abandoned God and the word of God. What we are seeing is an evil do-nothing king who has surrounded himself with drunken adulterers who spend their days plotting his assassination.

“With such a fever running at every level of society, it was no coincidence that Israel’s last three decades were a turmoil of intrigue, as one conspirator after another hacked his way to the throne, only to be murdered in his turn. Of the six men who reigned in those thirty years, four were assassins, and only one died in his own bed.”

It has been rightly said that the people of a nation tend to get the leaders they deserve, and I think we see that here with the leaders of Israel. And perhaps we have also seen some modern examples of that sad fact.

Hosea 7:6

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

In verse 6 we see the ovens again, but this time the focus is not on the baker but instead is on the ovens themselves. And those ovens are being compared with the hearts of the mockers that we saw at the end of verse 5.

These mockers approach their intrigue just like an oven that smolders all night and then blazes forth in the morning as the day begins. The anger of these mockers is like the fire that is heating this oven.

But why are the mockers angry? Do mockers really need a reason to be angry? And, more to the point, can we separate their mockery from their anger? Don't they mock because of their anger? Have you ever met a happy mocker?

It has been said that when a wicked man comes to the depth and worst of sin, he first despises, and then he mocks. The mockers from verse 5 are first **smoldering** with anger and then **blazing** with anger in verse 6.

In verse 4, the burning oven was a symbol for the burning lust of adultery, but here the same burning oven is a symbol for the burning lust of power. In each case, the key word is "lust." The lust of man is like a constantly smoldering oven that occasionally blazes forth like a flaming fire.

We again see here an indication that the baker (the king) is asleep on the job. Any baker who wanted his bread ready in the morning would have had to get the oven blazing long before the morning arrived. But here the oven doesn't blaze until the sun rises, which tells us that this lazy baker is not very attentive to what is going on around him.

Hosea 7:7

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

All of these mocking, adulterous plotters are as hot as an oven. Their plots and their adulteries are raging like a burning oven - but the baker is asleep on the job.

And so what happens? Where we might now expect to see fresh bread being devoured, we instead see rulers being devoured. The king has gone from being the baker to being the bread.

“All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.”

Even though we saw the “king” (singular) back in verse 3, I think this verse tells us that the text here does not have a specific king in mind, but is instead a description of what occurred with many kings. The rulers (plural) are devoured. The kings (plural) have fallen. None of them (plural) call upon God.

And, again, we are reminded of the history of the time. The people who were listening to this illustration from Hosea had lived through five kings within about a year’s time! And they had seen two assassinations (Zechariah and Pekahiah) and a civil war!

Proverbs 28:2 - When a land transgresses, **it has many rulers**, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.

I think this section in Hosea is describing what all of that intrigue had in common - smoldering and burning plots from the evil people with whom the king had surrounded himself, combined with smoldering and burning lusts that prevented the king from seeing what was going on around him.

And what could the king have done instead? The king could have called upon God, but he did not. None of them did. And, as a result, the leaders fell and the people suffered.

Proverbs 29:2 - When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan.

Proverbs 16:12 - It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.

And what we see here with these plotting mockers is that they have put themselves in the place of God. Later in Hosea 8:4, God will say, "They made kings, but not through me." The people made their own kings with no thought for what God wanted, and the nation was suffering as a result.

Hosea 7:8

8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned.

Verse 8 presents a terrible indictment of both the people and their leaders.

First, Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples. What does that mean?

The picture here is of flour that is not mixed with oil (as in Exodus 29:2), but that is instead polluted by being mixed with other things.

What that illustration means is that the people had not separated themselves from the peoples of the land, but had instead mixed themselves with those peoples.

That is not God's will for his people - not then and not now.

Leviticus 20:23-24, 26 - And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. ... You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 - You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

Psalms 4:3 - But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

Jeremiah 10:2-3 - Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity.

2 Corinthians 6:17 - Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you.

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Revelation 18:4 - Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

And how had the people disobeyed God’s commands? How had they mixed themselves with the surrounding peoples? In at least three ways. They had mixed themselves religiously, culturally, and politically.

They had mixed themselves religiously.

In Hosea’s day, the people had adopted the false gods and religious rituals of the surrounding peoples.

We have already discussed the problem of syncretism, in which two religions are mixed together to create a new religion. The people had done that by mixing the true of worship of the one true God with

their false worship of their false gods. In doing so, they had rejected God while keeping the rituals of God.

The same thing happens today when people mix the worship of God with the philosophies and politics of this world.

They had mixed themselves culturally.

In Hosea's day, the people had adopted the values of the surrounding peoples. Very often, such compromises were required to maintain peace with the powerful nations that surrounded them.

And, I think the picture we see here of a burning oven is of a slow gradual process that made it hard for the people and their rulers to see what was happening. And isn't that always the way with compromise?

Think about our own recent history. In 1939, a single four-letter word in the movie "Gone With the Wind" became a national scandal. Today, 85 years later, God's name is regularly blasphemed in our homes by that same Hollywood crowd in ways that defy belief and even imagination — yet few raise any objection.

James 2:7 - Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

There is always a danger that the people of God will be changed by the world. But we are called to change the world, not to be changed by the world.

Matthew 5:13 - You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

Like salt, we must be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16).

Like salt, we must be noticed for the difference that we make.

Like salt, we must never just blend in unnoticed like salt that has lost its taste.

They had mixed themselves politically.

In Hosea's day, the people had embraced the politics of the surrounding peoples by entering into foreign alliances and vassal relationships.

And this was why they no longer looked to God. This is why, as we saw in verse 7, the kings were not calling upon God. They had placed their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They thought Assyria or Egypt would protect them and save them.

They had rejected the governance of God for governance from the surrounding nations and from themselves. They had mixed themselves politically so that they were no longer the people of God.

Is that sort of mixing still a problem today? Absolutely it is.

We see a mixture of religion and politics very often today. And, yes, if done right so that we function like salt in the politics of our day, that could lead to an improvement of our politics and our politicians, but that is almost never how it is done and almost never what happens.

“When religious leaders enter into electoral politics, it is more likely that religion will be debased than that politics will be elevated.”

How should the church operate in the world of politics? I think we see a very good example in the New Testament. In the first century, Christians were a religious minority lacking worldly power and political influence - and yet they turned the world upside down! (Acts 17:6)

How did they do that? What did they do? Perhaps we should also ask what did they **not** do?

Lesson 27

Hosea 7:8 (Continued)

8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned.

When we ended our previous lesson, we were looking at the first half of verse 8, and we saw that the people of Ephraim had mixed themselves with the surrounding peoples in three ways: religiously, culturally, and politically.

As for their political mixing, the people of Hosea's day had embraced the politics of the surrounding peoples by entering into foreign alliances and vassal relationships with them.

They had placed their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They thought Assyria or Egypt would protect them and save them.

Jeremiah 17:5 - Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD."

When we ended last time, we were looking at the question of whether that sort of mixing with politics is still a problem today - and we saw that it is still a problem today.

And as for how the church should operate in the world of politics, I think we find our best example in the New Testament. In the first century, Christians were a religious minority lacking any worldly power or political influence - and yet they turned the world upside down! (Acts 17:6)

How did they do that? What did they do? Perhaps we should also ask what did they **not** do?

The unchallenged assumption today among many in the wider religious world is that all will be well if we can just get the right person

into office - and yet where do we find such a hope as that anywhere in the Bible?

“Did Jesus ever suggest by word or by example that we should aspire to acquire, let alone take over, the power of Caesar? Did Jesus spend any time and energy trying to improve, let alone dominate, the reigning government of his day? Did Jesus ever work to pass laws against the sinners he ministered to? Did Jesus worry at all about ensuring that his rights and the rights of his followers were protected? Does any New Testament author remotely hint that engaging in this sort of activity has anything to do with the kingdom of God?”

History tells us that the best thing the government can do for the church is to ignore it and be indifferent to it. In that situation, we are best positioned to do the work of God. That was the relationship between Rome and the church very early in the church's history.

But, later, that relationship changed as Rome began to actively persecute the church. But even while the church was faced with that persecution, the church continued to grow and the word continued to spread. In fact, in some ways, that persecution by Rome helped the church. How? Because the persecution weeded out those who were half-hearted and insincere. Persecution helped the church remain pure in its early days.

But again, that all changed when later, under Constantine, Rome quit persecuting the church and instead embraced the church.

When we look at the history of the early church, what we find is that Rome did the most damage to the church, not when Rome **ignored** the church or when Rome **persecuted** the church, but later when Rome **embraced** the church - when it suddenly became fashionable to be a Christian. That is when the worst apostasy began.

We need to be very fearful of any embrace by worldly powers. We must never mix our governance by God with the politics of this world. Our salvation comes from God and from God alone. Politics will not save us. We must not rely on it, and we must not place our trust in it.

Psalm 146:3 - Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

Lamentations 4:17 - Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save.

Yes, we **can** be involved in politics and perhaps we **must** be involved with politics, but we must never **trust** in politics, we must never **embrace** politics, we must never be **changed** by politics, and we must never allow politics to **hinder** our work for Christ.

At its best, politics is just a **tool** for us to use in **saving others** by more freely proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

The people of Hosea's day did not look to God for salvation, but instead they turned for their salvation to the worldly powers of their day. They trusted in the arm of man rather than in the arm of God.

Let's look next at the second half of verse 8.

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.”

What does that mean?

George Adam Smith: “How better describe a half-fed people, a half-cultured society, a half-lived religion, a half-hearted policy, than by a half-baked scone?”

“Ephraim is a cake not turned.” That phrase looks back to the illustration of the baker that we saw earlier. And, again, the picture is that of a king who is asleep on the job.

The king should have been leading the people toward God, but he was not. Instead, Ephraim was a cake not turned - Ephraim was a cake that was forgotten about and neglected by its baker.

“Unfortunately, the state is like an unflipped pancake on a skillet, a product easily recognized as unserviceable and inedible. It has, furthermore, an interesting profile, cooked on one side and raw on the other. No one starts the task of cooking pancakes with such a result in mind; a badly cooked cake is the result of something going awry in the cooking process. This is apparently what the simile of the cake intends to say about the diplomatic processes in which Ephraim is mixed up.”

And the lesson for us today is clear - we need to guard against being half-baked Christians charred on one side and soggy on the other side! A half-baked cake is not good for anything.

Hosea 7:9

9 Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not.

Verse 9 continues the metaphor of the cake that we saw at the end of verse 8, and by that metaphor verse 9 shows us two areas in which the king's neglect of his duty was evident.

The first thing we see about that cake in verse 8 is that foreigners were eating it. And I think we can see two ways in which that happened.

First, foreigners were taking away the material resources and agricultural resources of the nation.

2 Kings 15:20 - Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy men, fifty shekels of silver from every man, to give to the king of Assyria.

But, second, as we have already seen, the foreigners were drawing the people away into their foreign religion and into their foreign ways.

And, of course, as verse 9 tells us, that metaphorical devouring of the cake was a devouring of the strength of the people.

They looked to foreign powers for help and for salvation, but all those foreign powers cared about was what they could get for themselves. By carrying off the material resources and by drawing the people further away from God, those foreign alliances weakened rather than strengthened the nation.

And this weakening was all happening right under the nose of the king - but, as verse 9 tells us, "he knows it not." The king likely thought he was saving the nation with his appeal to Assyria or to Egypt, but the opposite was true.

"Gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not."
What does that mean?

It could mean the these troubles were making the king's hair turn gray (as the ESV and many commentaries suggest), but that doesn't really make sense for at least two reasons.

First, a gray head was highly regarded in ancient Israel.

Proverbs 16:31 - Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.

Proverbs 20:29 - The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.

Second, it is not clear how the present situation could have caused the king's hair to turn gray when the king "knew it not." It is hard to get gray hair from worrying about something that you don't even know about.

I think a better way of viewing this phrase is that it is describing a gray fuzz of mold that appears on the bread. The Hebrew phrase is "sprinkled with gray," which could refer to sprinkled hair but could also refer to something else that is sprinkled, such as mold.

That view makes more sense from the context because it continues the bread analogy we have been seeing.

If the sprinkled gray in verse 9 does refer to sprinkled mold, then the second half of verse 9 is again showing us the weakened state of the nation and is again casting the blame on a weak king who was not doing his job but who was instead letting that unturned cake sit around until it was covered in gray mold.

Hosea 7:10

10 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him, for all this.

We saw this same phrase back in Hosea 5.

Hosea 5:5 - The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

And I think the meaning here is the same as it was there. The pride of Israel **should** have been God, but it was not. Instead, Israel's pride was themselves, their foreign alliances, and their false gods. And it is those terrible sins of pride that are testifying against the people here in verse 10.

And after hearing that testimony, did the people return to God or seek God? No. They did neither of those things despite all of the testimony against them.

Earlier we saw Gomer not returning to Hosea, preferring instead to have sexual alliances with other men. Here we see Israel not returning to God, preferring instead to have foreign alliances with the surrounding nations.

Long ago, God had yielded to their demand for a king, but he had warned them what would happen.

1 Samuel 8:18 - And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.

That verse does not tell us **to whom** the people would cry out - and I think we see why here in Hosea 7. Yes, the people were crying out because of the terrible kings who were reigning over them, but they were **not** crying out to God. They were not seeking God.

And something else 1 Samuel tells us is that their misery was self-inflicted. They had been warned much earlier what would happen when they chose kings for themselves, and now it was happening.

Hosea 7:11-12

11 Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria. 12 As they go, I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like birds of the heavens; I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation.

Doves were commonly found in the area and were trapped for food. When they were baited, the doves tended to remain fixated on their pursuit of food, and the doves would remain near a source of food

even when suspicious activity by trappers was very nearby. Other birds would leave the food behind and fly away from the threat, but not the doves. And while the doves were feeding, the trap would spring and the net would drop.

Hosea tells us that Ephraim is just like that dove - silly and without sense! Ephraim was ignoring the traps that were placed all around them.

The dove could have easily escaped the danger simply by flying away, but the dove did not. Likewise, Ephraim could have escaped the danger by returning to God, but Ephraim did not. Both Ephraim and the dove were completely fixated on what they were seeking - heedless of the nearby danger and the nearby way of escape.

It is interesting that God is both the danger and the way of escape for this silly dove.

In verse 10, we saw how God was the way of escape - they could have returned to God or sought God, but they did not. So, as a result, God became the danger in verse 12 - not Egypt, and not Assyria, but God. God says: "I will spread my net. I will bring them down. I will discipline them."

But, of course, as we have already seen, God could use Assyria and Egypt as tools to punish Israel. Either Assyria or Egypt could be viewed as the net spread by God to trap Ephraim.

The last line of verse 12 is very obscure.

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

What does that mean?

The NIV translates that line as: "When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them." But I agree with the commentator who describes that translation as "an imaginative attempt to tie this line to the fowler imagery, but [one that] is difficult to justify." And I don't think a good imagination should be at the top of our list for qualities we want to see in a Bible translator!

The short answer as to what the end of verse 12 means is that no one knows for sure.

Most likely, the “report” made to “their congregation” is the report of some diplomatic failure with Assyria or Egypt that comes back to the governing assembly of Israel. It is possible that the “report” itself included penalties against Israel for whatever failure had occurred - and perhaps, as with the net, God is using those penalties to punish the people.

Another commentary suggests that this final line refers to God’s decision (using Assyria) to destroy Israel once the news of her deceptive alliance with Egypt became known, and that is also a possibility.

Let’s look at what happened with that Egyptian alliance.

Egypt is mentioned by name 13 times in the book of Hosea. We saw it first back in Hosea 2:15, where God looked back fondly at the days of Israel’s youth when she first came out of Egypt.

Here in verse 11, we see the second of those 13 times Egypt is mentioned. What that means is that almost all of the mentions of Egypt in the book of Hosea are found in the second half of the book. Why?

I think the answer is the significant role that Egypt played in the final days of Israel prior to the Assyrian invasion. As we know, Hoshea was the final king of Israel, and we read about his disastrous alliance with Egypt in 2 Kings 17.

2 Kings 17:1-6 - In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, **for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt**, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria

and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The final straw for Assyria when it came to Israel was Hoshea's decision to seek help from Egypt rather than to continue in its vassal relationship with Assyria. That decision turned out to be the end for both Hoshea and for his people, Israel.

But we should pause and ask a question about those verses we just read from 2 Kings 17. Who was So, king of Egypt?

That question is a very complicated question that we will not spend too much time on, but the Handout for Lesson 27 shows some of the difficulties in answering it.

I have mentioned Immanuel Velikovsky before. He argued that the standard Egyptian chronology is off by as much as 600 years, and he presents a great deal of evidence to support that view. Much of that evidence is from the Bible, and he shows that the alignment between the Bible and Egyptian history is much improved after his proposed corrections to Egyptian chronology are applied.

We see such an example here. In 1 Kings 14 we find a record of an Egypt king (Pharaoh Shishak) carrying away treasures from Jerusalem, and again in 2 Kings 17 we find King Hoshea withholding tribute from Assyria and apparently giving it to an Egypt king (Pharaoh So) instead.

In Egyptian reliefs we likewise find two instances in which Egypt received treasures from Palestine, and those two examples are shown on the handout. The example on the left is from the reign of Thutmose III, and the example on the right is from the reign of Shoshenk.

Velikovsky's proposed solution was simple - the two different examples from Egyptian archeology correspond to the two different descriptions in the Bible. But for that solution to work, the standard Egyptian chronology must be adjusted. And, in my opinion, the best evidence for applying such an adjustment is that it causes the Egyptian records to align much better with the Biblical record.

If Velikovsky is correct, then Pharaoh So in 2 Kings 17:4 was Pharaoh Shoshenk, and Pharaoh Shishak of 1 Kings 14 was Pharaoh Thutmose III.

If Velikovsky is not correct, then Pharaoh Shishak of 1 Kings 14 was Pharaoh Shoshenk, and the Egyptian records are not much help in identifying Pharaoh So.

Hosea 7:13

13 Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me.

Verse 13 is a lament over Ephraim's refusal to repent and return to God. They have strayed from God, they have rebelled against God, and they are lying about God. As a result, they will experience woe and destruction, and they will not be redeemed by God.

As we recall, Hosea redeemed Gomer after she was faithless to him, but God will not redeem Ephraim. The earlier event in the life of Hosea and Gomer showed us what God wanted to do - he wanted to redeem Ephraim as Hosea had redeemed Gomer - but that was not going to happen because Ephraim was lying about God.

What we see in verse 13 is a beautiful portrait of God's love. Despite all that Ephraim had done and was still doing, look at what God says in the final line of verse 13 - "I would redeem them!" Even now, it was still God's will that Ephraim be redeemed. Even now, God did not want to give up on them.

That has always been God's will for mankind - God wants to redeem us all. And that remains true no matter how far we stray from him or how much we rebel against him.

Ezekiel 33:11 — Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.**

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.**

1 Timothy 2:3-4 - This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, **who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

And the only explanation for **why** that is God's will is the love of God.

Romans 5:8 - But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And what were these lies about God in verse 13 that prevented Ephraim from being redeemed?

Given the context of chapter 7, the focus here may be on the priests who were advising the political leaders and who were leading the people into apostasy. If so, then these lies were lies about God being spoken by the priests to the leaders and to the people. And these lies by the priests were lies that were then being believed and repeated by the leaders and by the people.

And what were the lies? We have already seen them. The priests were saying that the people could mix the worship of God with their false worship of their false gods and still be pleasing to God. And the priests were advising the leaders to look elsewhere for their salvation - to Egypt and to Assyria rather than to God.

And why were those lies believed? Because the people did not know God! What we are seeing here is the fulfillment of what God said earlier in chapter 4.

Hosea 4:6 - My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

The priests had rejected knowledge, and as a result, both they and the people they led astray would be rejected and forgotten.

To be pleasing to God, we must know God - not just know about God, but know God. That knowledge of God was lacking in the days of Hosea, and we can see the sad outcome.

And why was that knowledge lacking? I think Nehemiah answers that question.

Nehemiah 9:26 - Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and **cast your law behind their back** and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.

They did not just neglect God's word; they deliberately cast it behind their back! Their ignorance of God was a willful ignorance. They did not want to know God. And why not? Because they preferred to continue sinning, and so they cast away the word of God.

John 3:19-20 - And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

They hate the light, and so what do they do? They cast the word of God behind their back. Jesus encountered people with the same attitude:

John 8:43 - Why do you not understand what I say? **It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.**

And I think the order that we see in verse 13 is important. First, they strayed. Then they rebelled. And then they lied.

At first they wandered off the true path onto a false path, then they deliberately remained on that false path, and finally they lied about God to make others believe that their false path was actually the true path.

And is the sequence of apostasy any different today? First, they wander away. Then they deliberately remain away. And finally they justify what they have done by lying about God.

Hosea 7:14

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

This is a difficult verse, but I think what we are seeing here are examples of how the people had chosen Baal over God. Rather than crying to God from the heart, they rebelled against God and served and worshipped Baal.

“They wail upon their beds.”

We don’t have many details about the various rituals the people practiced in their false worship of Baal, but we can infer some details about those rituals based on the condemnations that we read in the Bible.

For example, in Ezekiel 8, the prophet was given a tour of the temple in a vision so that he could see the abominations that were occurring there. And one of the abominations that he saw was women weeping for Tammuz.

Ezekiel 8:14-15 - Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, **there sat women weeping for Tammuz**. Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these.”

Tammuz was a Sumerian god of vegetation who was thought to have died and become god of the underworld. Ishtar was his wife, and the people believed that she would follow after Tammuz into the underworld, which caused the vegetation to die in the summer and winter.

The weeping and mourning in Ezekiel 8:14 was a longing for the return of earthly abundance. The people believed that the eventual revival of Tammuz caused the return of spring and brought fertility to the land.

The cult associated with Tammuz included these weeping rituals witnessed by Ezekiel as well as fertility rituals celebrating the return of spring.

Yes, Ezekiel 8 is describing Tammuz rather than Baal, but I think we can safely say that when you have seen one false fertility god, you have seen them all!

And I suspect that the same pagan rituals that we see in Ezekiel being practiced in the worship of Tammuz were also being practiced in the worship of Baal.

And I think we see some evidence of that right here when we see the people wailing upon their beds in verse 14.

We know they were not wailing about their sin because, as this same verse tells us, they were still rebelling against God. And while they might have been wailing about the judgments coming upon them, I don't think that is what is happening here. Why not? Because of the next description we see in verse 14.

Lesson 28

Hosea 7:14 (Continued)

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

When we ended last week, we were about to look at the second half of verse 14. In the first half, we saw people wailing on their beds, and we suggested that wailing was done as a part of their worship of the false fertility god Baal. One reason we reached that conclusion was the second half of the verse, which we will look at next.

“For grain and wine they gash themselves.”

The grain and the wine confirm that what we are seeing here are fertility rituals. The people are doing these things for a purpose - for grain and for wine.

And what are they doing? In the previous phrase they were wailing, and here they are gashing themselves. I think that this wailing and this gashing were both rituals done in their worship of Baal.

And as additional confirmation, we in fact see such wailing and such self-laceration in the worship of Baal in the great contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

1 Kings 18:27-28 - And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” And they **cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom** with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

I think we see those same two rituals here in verse 14. The people are not crying out to God or worshipping God, but they are instead crying out to Baal and worshipping Baal. They are rebelling against God.

Hosea 7:15

15 Although I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against me.

As we have seen, Ephraim first wanted to be a vassal state of Assyria, but later wanted to be a vassal state of Egypt instead. Here in verse 15, God is telling Ephraim what it really was - **a vassal state of God!**

And as the people would eventually rebel and devise evil against Assyria, so had they already rebelled and devised evil against God.

As a vassal state of God, God had trained them and strengthened them. God had given them their land; God had fought for them in that land; and God had taught them how to fight for themselves in that land.

Joshua 23:3 - And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.

In short, God had done everything for the people that Assyria promised to do for its own vassal states.

And in return? Assyria demanded tribute and obedience and loyalty - as did God. God wanted their worship and their obedience and their loyalty.

Joshua 23:6-8 - Therefore, be very strong to **keep and to do all that is written** in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, **that you may not mix with these nations** remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall **cling to the LORD your God** just as you have done to this day.

But did the people do that? God fought for them; did they respond by keeping the Law and by refusing to mix with the surrounding peoples and by clinging to God? No, they did not. Instead, they rebelled against God - just as they would also later rebel against Assyria.

And, as for the command in Joshua 23 not to mix with the surrounding nations, we have already seen what the people did instead: "Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples!" (Hosea 7:8)

Isaiah described the people the same way as we see here in Hosea.

Isaiah 30:1-2 - "Ah, stubborn children," declares the LORD, "**who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit**, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!"

Isaiah 30:9-11 - For they are a **rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD**; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

They were rebels, they were liars, and they were traitors. They disobeyed God, and they were disloyal to God.

Hosea 7:16

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

"They return, but not upward."

There is a translation issue with this phrase. The Hebrew text reads, “they turn not upward,” which, we are told, is an unusual expression in Hebrew, both in its word-order and in its meaning.

As for the unusual meaning, the final Hebrew word “al” is usually a preposition meaning “on” or “over” rather than a noun as it seems to be here (as in “they return, but not to the **height**.”)

But anyone who has ever seen an airplane from Israel knows that sometimes “al” is used as a noun. The Israeli airline is named “El Al,” which means “to the height.” Also, we will see this same Hebrew phrase again later in Hosea 11:7 (“though they call him to the height.”). So, unusual or not, the Hebrew word is sometimes used as a noun.

But some modern translations (such as the RSV) assume that a copying error has occurred, and so they substitute a similar Hebrew phrase meaning “to Baal.” The RSV reads: “They turn **to Baal**.” But the “copyist error” explanation should be our very last resort - not our first. And here we certainly have no need to assume that any error has occurred during the copying of the text.

I think the ESV translation is okay (“they **return**, but not upward”) but I think the word “turn” is better than “return” because I think verse 16 is telling us that the people **turned** to Baal rather than to God.

The best translation I could find of this verse (and I checked 87 of them!) is the *Christian Standard Bible*’s translation: “**They turn, but not to what is above.**”

And, yes, the phrase “not upward” most likely means “not to God,” but again the goal of a good translation is not to remove all ambiguity. If there is some ambiguity in the original language, then that ambiguity should be carried over to the English translation. So I do **not** prefer the KJV translation (“They return, but not to **the most High**.”)

“They are like a treacherous bow.”

We have seen some strange word pictures in this chapter, and here we see another one. The inedible cake, the silly bird, and now the flawed weapon.

A treacherous bow is a bow that is warped and unreliable. It is a bow that would fail you in a life or death situation when you needed it the most.

Psalm 78:56-57 - Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep his testimonies, but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; **they twisted like a deceitful bow.**

The really interesting thing here, though, is the one who was planning on using this bow - God! The people are God's weapon, and God has found them to be unreliable. Like this bow, they fail God at the point where God needs them the most!

What does that mean? When did God need them? After all, Acts 17:25 tells us that God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

God did not need the people in the sense of Acts 17:25, but God did need the people in the sense that God wanted to use them to bless the entire world through Christ. God wanted to use the people to fulfill his great promise to Abraham.

But the people were a treacherous bow. They were not the weapon that God needed to carry out his plans. They let God down just like a bow that turned out to be warped so that it could not shoot straight.

And what did God do? What God did was look elsewhere.

God looked to Judah in the south. And although Judah also had its own problems and weaknesses, God was able to use the people of Judah after their return from Babylonian exile to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple and to prepare the way for the Messiah.

We need to pray every day that we - **spiritual** Israel, the church - will never fail God as **physical** Israel did. We must also strive to be useful to God, and not useless to God as the people here in verse 16. God wants us to be a useful weapon in his hand!

"Their princes shall fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue."

It is truly amazing how many of our troubles and our problems can be traced back to our tongues.

James 3:5-6 - So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Here we see kings falling because of what they said. (And, of course, that still happens today!)

And what did those kings say? How were they insolent? They were insolent to God; they were insolent to their friends and to their advisors; they were insolent to their rivals; they were insolent to their own people; and they were insolent to foreign leaders.

And so they fell. As we have said, of the six men who reigned in the final thirty years of Israel's history, only one died in his own bed. Most of them arrived through assassination, left through assassination, or both.

“This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.”

As we have seen, Israel's final downfall happened very quickly, and it started with a behind-the-scenes appeal to Egypt.

2 Kings 17:4 - But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

And how do we suppose Egypt reacted to that outcome?

I suspect that the final fall of Israel gave Egypt a big laugh! You can be very sure that if it happened today, Egypt would react that same way - and I don't think much has changed with Israel, Egypt, and modern-day Assyria in the last 3000 years!

What we see here in verse 16 are leaders of Israel who talk a big game, but who have nothing with which to back up their big talk.

With their insolent talk, they acted like a big power - they acted as if they were equals to Egypt and Assyria - but, of course, they were not. And so Egypt laughed when Assyria invaded.

Introduction to Hosea 8-13

From Chapter 8 to almost near the end of the book, we find lamentations over Israel's sin. Sometimes God speaks in the first person, and sometimes Hosea speaks about God in the third person.

Hosea 8:2 [*First Person*] - To **me** they cry, "My God, we — Israel — know you."

Hosea 12:2 [*Third Person*] - **The LORD** has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; **he** will repay him according to his deeds.

That pattern parallels what we saw in the first three chapters. In Chapter 1, we saw a description of Hosea's marriage in the third person. But later in Chapter 3, we saw a description of Hosea's marriage in the first person.

Hosea 1:3 [*Third Person*] - So **he** went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore **him** a son.

Hosea 3:2 [*First Person*] - So **I** bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.

In each case, the aggrieved husband (either Hosea or God) tells his own story in the first person but also has his story told in the third person by the other aggrieved husband.

What is the purpose of that unusual structure? We can't say for sure, but I think we can say that it does serve to firmly link what happened between Hosea and Gomer with what was happening between God and Israel. And we know that linkage was the reason why Hosea was told to marry Gomer in the first place.

A recurring theme in these final chapters is the historical perspective that is provided by God's (often fond) recollections of Israel's former (and often better) days, especially during the exodus from Egypt.

And, in response, Hosea likewise recalls some historical events from the life of Jacob.

And why do we see that history in these final chapters?

First, that history adds to the sadness of these lamentations by recalling happier times between the husband (God) and his wife (Israel). Those happy days were now long gone.

And second, that history reminds us that what was happening now was not new. Instead, we saw evidence of Israel's bad character from the very beginning. The question was always whether Israel would rise above it and be faithful to her husband - and we now have the sad answer to that question.

We will see two major images in Chapters 8-10.

First, we will see how Israel had depended, not on God, but on their fertility cults and on their own military power for prosperity and security.

And second, we will see how both of those things on which they depended were proving to be hollow. Israel's military would soon be overwhelmed and defeated, and the fertility cults would soon be proved powerless by a famine.

Hosea 8:1

1 Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law.

Our view of verse 1 depends entirely on the translation of a single word. Here are the two options:

(KJV) "Set the trumpet to thy mouth. He shall come as an **eagle** against the house of the LORD..."

(ESV) "Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a **vulture** is over the house of the LORD..."

The Hebrew word *nešer* can refer to either a vulture or an eagle, so we must determine the correct bird from the context. But that is easier said than done! In fact, either bird can make sense in this context (although I favor the translation of “eagle” for the reasons we are about to consider).

What does verse 1 mean if the bird is a vulture?

If the bird in verse 1 is a vulture, then the “house of the Lord” in verse 1 likely refers to the temple.

And the thought of verse 1 would be that the enemy is coming like a vulture and so one should blow the trumpet (Hebrew *shofar*) as vigorously as a priest would have blown a horn if a vulture (a notoriously unclean bird) had lighted on the roof of the temple.

Such an event would not only have been unclean, but it would have been seen as a very bad omen, and so we can be sure that the priests would have made every noise they could to scare the vulture away from the temple. That is how frantically the trumpet should be blown now that Assyria is coming.

What does verse 1 mean if the bird is an eagle?

Right from the start, we can perhaps say that the translation of an “eagle” may be more likely than that of a “vulture.” Why? Because the eagle is a predatory bird that travels alone while the vulture is a carrion eater that travels in a group - and we see only one bird in verse 1.

Another point in favor of an “eagle” is that it fits nicely with the image that was used much earlier to describe the exodus - which is an event we will see often in these final chapters.

Exodus 19:4 - You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on **eagles’ wings** and brought you to myself.

Deuteronomy 32:11-12 - **Like an eagle** that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.

If that is why we see an eagle here in verse 1, then Hosea is describing a great reversal. During the exodus, God protected the people like an eagle - but now, God is coming as an eagle or perhaps sending Assyria an eagle against the same people.

And, in that regard, it is interesting that this same reversal is listed among the curses in Deuteronomy 28 that would come if the people were disobedient.

Deuteronomy 28:49 - The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, **swooping down like the eagle**, a nation whose language you do not understand.

In fact, that verse may be more than just interesting - as we say in the legal business, that verse may be dispositive. That is, Hosea 8:1 may be specifically referring back to that curse in Deuteronomy 28, where the bird “swooping down” is certainly an eagle. Vultures flutter down; they do not swoop down.

If the bird in verse 1 is an eagle (which I think is a better choice than “vulture”), then the “house of the Lord” in verse 1 likely refers, not to the temple, but to the people and to the land of Israel. They are the “house of God” that God previously protected like an eagle protecting its nest, but that now God was about to swoop down upon like an attacking eagle.

And why is that happening? The end of verse 1 answers that question: “because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law.”

These two sins are the umbrella that includes every sin that the people had committed. Their root problem was that they had broken their covenant with God and they had disobeyed the law of God.

And once again, we are brought right back to the list of curses in Deuteronomy 28. What was it that would cause the people to experience those curses? The same two things we see here in verse 1 - disobeying the law and breaking the covenant.

Deuteronomy 28:45 - All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, **because you did not obey the voice of the**

LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.

Deuteronomy 29:9 - Therefore **keep the words of this covenant and do them**, that you may prosper in all that you do.

So, again, I think “eagle” is the correct translation because I think Hosea 8:1 is bringing us all the way back to the warnings that God gave the people in Deuteronomy 28 at the beginning of their history.

And now, at the end of their history, we see the fulfillment of those warnings. The people disobeyed the law and broke the covenant, and so the promised curses are now coming upon them.

As we will be told just a few verses from now, the people had sown the wind, and they were now reaping the whirlwind. The Psalmist described them very well.

Psalm 78:9-11 - The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God’s **covenant**, but refused to walk according to his **law**. They forgot his works and the wonders that he had shown them.

Why did they break the covenant? Why did they disobey the law? The Psalmist just told us - because “they forgot his works.” And Hosea has repeatedly given us the same answer as the Psalmist just did - it was because they did not know God.

But they sure thought they knew God! Keep reading...

Lesson 29

As we saw last week, the problem with the people of Israel was that they did not know God. If anyone on earth should have known God, it was Israel - but they did not.

But did they **know** that they did **not know** God? No. They did not know that. Instead, they believed the opposite was true. They believed that they did know God. That is what we see in verse 2. And it is a very common attitude among those who do not know God.

They never open the Bible, they disobey God at every step, they encourage others to do the same - and yet they claim to know God. We meet such people in verse 2.

Hosea 8:2-3

2 To me they cry, "My God, we - Israel - know you." 3
Israel has spurned the good; the enemy shall pursue him.

What are verses 2 and 3 telling us about the people? We can turn to the New Testament for an answer to that question.

Titus 1:16 - They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

We can shout all day that we know God - as many people did then and as many people still do today - but whether we know God is not determined just by what we say or by what we shout - it is also determined by what we do.

Matthew 7:21 - Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Not those who say - but those who do.

And if saying things is not enough, we can be certain that thinking things is also not enough. We cannot think our way into Heaven.

Not those who say - but those who do.

Here, the people were telling God, “we know you!” But they did not know God.

And how do we know that? Because they spurned the good.

No one who knows God will ever spurn the good. Yes, people who just know **about** God might spurn the good - but no one who knows God will ever do that.

And, of course, that wonderful knowledge of God is a great prophecy about everyone in the church that we find in Jeremiah 31 and that is quoted in Hebrews 8:11.

Jeremiah 31:34 - And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ **for they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

That knowledge of God is true of **spiritual** Israel, but it was **not** true of **physical** Israel at this time.

And **when** did the people utter this cry to God? Almost certainly it was during their false worship of Baal, which we know they had mixed with the worship of God.

They thought they had covered all the bases. They thought they were saying all the right things. But they had not, and they were not.

What we see here is a very religious people who were about as far away from God as it was possible for them to be! They were no better than the “very religious” Gentiles in Acts 17:22-23 who were worshipping the unknown god along with all their other gods!

Hosea 8:4

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

“They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.”

Our first question about this statement is how far back does it go?

We have two options. Either it applies just to the current batch of kings, who we know were largely just a bunch of cut-throat assassins. Or perhaps it goes all the way back to Israel's first king - Jeroboam I, who was the first king to reign over the north after the kingdom was divided.

As we have seen, the focus here is on those in the northern kingdom who were listening to Hosea and who were experiencing the curses brought on by their disobedience at the end of Israel's history. And so, because of that context, I think the kings and the princes in verse 4 are the rulers of Hosea's own day (or least some of them) that we have already discussed many times.

But another reason I think that view is correct is that it is not clear at all that the statement in verse 4 would apply to Israel's first king after the kingdom was divided, Jeroboam I.

Yes, Jeroboam was evil - as were all the kings of the north - but I don't think we can say that Jeroboam I was made king by the people but not through God.

In 1 Kings 11, the prophet Ahijah met Jeroboam on the road, and here is what the prophet told him:

1 Kings 11:30-38 - Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon **and will give you ten tribes** ... 35 But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand **and will give it to you, ten tribes**. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before

me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. **And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.** And I will afflict the offspring of David because of this, but not forever.’”

And, yes, (as we see on the Handout for Lesson 29) 1 Kings 12:20 does say that **the people** “made him king,” but in 1 Kings 14:7, God says, “**I exalted you ... and made you leader over my people.**”

And so I don’t think we should list Jeroboam I among the kings in Hosea 8:4 that were made king by the people, but not through God.

For the same reason, I don’t think we should include the dynasty of Baasha. Yes, Baasha and his son, Elah, were evil, but again in 1 Kings 16:1-2, God says that he exalted Bassha and made him leader over the people.

And I don’t think we should include the house of Jehu either.

2 Kings 9:6 - So he [Jehu] arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, **I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel.**”

2 Kings 10:30 - And the LORD said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, **your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.**”

That promised third and fourth generation was King Jeroboam II and King Zechariah, and so I don’t think we can include Jeroboam II and Zechariah among the kings of Hosea 8:4 even though they were kings during Hosea’s own day.

If you look at the Handout for Lesson 29, the dynasties highlighted in green are the ones for which God says that he made them king, or made them leader, or had them anointed king. And the dynasties in red are the ones for which either we are told only that the people made them king or for which the Bible is silent about who made them king.

And while we could go back to Zimri, Tibni, and the house of Omri, I think the context here suggests we should look at the more recent kings - the ones about whom Hosea's listeners would be most familiar.

If we do that, then I think we should start with Shallum, who murdered Zechariah, and also include the evil kings that followed Shallum: Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. I think those five kings are the kings and the princes in verse 4 who were not made by God but who were instead made just by the people.

And how did that work out? How did things go after the people started picking their own rulers without any thought for what God wanted? Civil war. Assassinations. Invasion. Destruction. Scattering. Exile. Death.

In short, the train went off the rails very quickly once the people started making plans apart from God. And isn't that always the case?

James 4:13-16 - Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

So the people were relying on themselves - **or were they?** Let's look at the second half of verse 4.

"With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction."

Were the people relying on their false gods instead of relying on themselves? No, they were not. Yes, they had false gods, but they

themselves had made those false gods! And we can be sure that those false gods followed the bidding of their creators!

In fact, verse 4 itself tells us that fact. How does the verse start out? “**Their false gods** made kings”? No. “**They** made kings!”

Yes, the people had made false gods - but they had also made those kings. The people were the ones pulling the strings here. They were making the decisions. And - surprise! - their false gods always agreed with them!

There is a lesson there for us. What did Paul tell us about the word of God?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, **for reproof, for correction**, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Now here is my question - when was the last time the Bible reproved me? When was the last time the Bible corrected me? And you can ask yourselves those same questions.

If the answer is never or not often - then perhaps I should wonder who is really in charge? Do I read the Bible just to validate how I am already living - or do I read the Bible to discover how God wants me to live? If the Bible never reproves me or corrects me, then I think I have my answer.

It is very telling here in verse 4 that the people were creating gods - but the people were still very much in charge.

One more question: Who is speaking in verse 4?

“They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but I knew it not.”

Who said that? All commentaries agree that question is an easy question, but not all commentaries agree on the easy answer to that easy question.

For those of us who believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that Hosea, as a prophet of God, proclaimed the words of God - the easy answer to the easy question of who is speaking in verse 4 is that God is speaking in verse 4. The pronouns “me” and “I” in verse 4 are pronouns that God is using to refer to himself.

For those commentaries that reject the inspiration of the Bible, the question is just as easy - but they have a different easy answer. They say that Hosea was just writing his own opinions, even when he sometimes made it look as if they were God's opinions. So that when Hosea 8:4 criticizes the monarchy, they say that was just Hosea's opinion about the monarchy and not anything that Hosea received from some supernatural source.

Here is an example from a commentary in that second category:

“This disclaimer does not indicate how far **Hosea's disapproval** of the monarchy went. Did **he dislike** the kings of the north, for disloyalty to David and Jerusalem; or the kings of both kingdoms, including David; or only selected kings chosen by people, in contrast to the ones chosen by God; or simply the upstart kings of Israel's decline such as Shallum and Menahem?”

I agree that verse 4 is giving us **someone's** view of the monarchy - but it is **not** giving us Hosea's view. Verse 4 is giving us God's view of the monarchy. Yes, Hosea most likely agreed with God's view, and yes, Hosea wrote it down - but it is God who is speaking in verse 4.

And we can expand that principle to the entire book. Whether or not Hosea is quoting God (as Hosea is doing here in verse 4), the words of Hosea are coming from God and not from Hosea. The book of Hosea is giving us God's views, not Hosea's views. That is the easy answer to our easy question, at least for those of us who believe in the Bible's inspiration.

2 Peter 1:21 - For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Hosea 8:5-6

5 I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? 6 For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

In verse 1, we saw a reference to the Exodus - God had protected the people like an eagle protects its nest - but now God was sending an eagle against them.

We also saw in verse 1 a reference to the curses that God told the people would come upon them if they disobeyed God and broke their covenant with God. And we know that the people who first heard those warnings had recently come out of the exodus.

- Later in verse 13 of this same chapter, we will see another reference to the exodus: “they shall return to Egypt.” God had rescued them from Egypt, but now God says they will return to Egypt.
- We will also see that promise in Hosea 9:6: “Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them.”
- In Hosea 11:1, we will see yet another reminder of the exodus - “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” And, of course, we know that verse also looked forward to the Messiah (Matthew 2:15).
- We will see the exodus again in Hosea 12:9 - “I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”
- And again in Hosea 13:4 - “But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”

So what can we say? What we can say is that we have another theme! The exodus out of Egypt is a major theme of at least the second half of the book of Hosea. And so, as a theme, we should be on the lookout for it.

Here in chapter 8, do we see that theme in verse 5? And the answer is yes, we do.

“I have spurned your calf, O Samaria.”

At the end of verse 4, we saw the people making golden idols for their own destruction. And at the beginning of verse 5, we find a calf. We are immediately reminded of a very shameful event that followed the exodus.

Exodus 32:1-4 - When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and **made a golden calf**. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

The handout for Lesson 28 shows a golden calf that dates to a time just before the exodus. It seems that the people did not waste any time following the bad example of the surrounding nations. That handout also gives a timeline of the golden calf - from the first one they made at Mount Sinai in 1447 BC up the last ones that were destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC.

As we saw in verse 4 about their current golden idols, the people also made that first golden calf for their own destruction.

Exodus 32:35 - Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

Did they learn a lesson from that experience? No, it seems they did not. When we look at how the northern kingdom began, here is what we find:

1 Kings 12:26-29 - And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” So the king took counsel and made **two calves of gold**. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. **Behold your gods, O Israel,**

who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.

If we fast-forward from the days of Moses and from the days of Jeroboam I to the days of King Jehu (whose dynasty had recently ended with Zechariah as prophesied of Hosea 1:4), here is what we find:

2 Kings 10:27-29 - And they demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel. But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin — **that is, the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.**

So what does that tell us? What it tells us is that the people of the north had worshipped golden calves from the very beginning of their history. And what it tells us is that in the days of Jehu, almost 1000 years after Moses, the people were still worshipping golden calves!

And we also see that those golden calves had been set up in Bethel, a city about which Hosea has already had much to say - even to the point of calling it Bethaven, meaning House of Emptiness, rather than Bethel (meaning house of God).

And so, the reference to Samaria in verses 5-6 is most likely a reference to the people of the northern kingdom rather than the city of Samaria. Why? Because it seems that the golden calves were likely in Bethel and Dan rather than in the city of Samaria. But the people of Samaria likely still traveled to Bethel to worship those golden calves as they did in 1 Kings 12.

Now, the translation of verses 5-6 is interesting. When we read it in English it seems choppy.

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel; a craftsman made it; it is not God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

And, in fact, apparently it also seems choppy in Hebrew. Here is how one commentary describes the original language:

The language is more like rhetoric than poetry, and the grammar is challenging. ... The topic is an idol called the “calf of Samaria,” ... which God rejects in what one may reverently call almost apoplectic anger. The broken grammar and uneven lines portray God as vexed in the extreme over the perversity of [what Israel had done].

I certainly don't think that God was what we might today call “spitting mad,” but I do think that God is likely portraying himself that way here to show us the depth of his anger at what the people were doing.

- After God led them out of Egypt, what did they do? They made golden calves and worshipped them.
- After King Solomon died and the kingdom was divided, what is the first thing the people of the north did? They made golden calves and worshipped them.
- After Jehu almost completely destroyed Baalism in the north, what did the people do? They kept the golden calves and worshipped them.
- And now, at the end of their history, what are the people doing? Worshipping golden calves.

I don't know - maybe God was spitting mad! That is how God portrays himself in verses 5-6.

And what does God tell them? He rejects their golden calf. His anger burns against them. They are unable to be innocent, and God asks if that will always be true. They themselves made that calf; it did not come from God. And it will be broken in pieces.

And how and when will it be broken in pieces? Hosea will answer that question when we get to chapter 10.

Hosea 10:5-6 - The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests — those who rejoiced over it and over its glory — for it has departed from them. The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king.

Not only could their golden calf not protect them, **but it could not even protect itself!** It would very soon be carried off to Assyria and broken in pieces.

Hosea 8:7

7 For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; it shall yield no flour; if it were to yield, strangers would devour it.

This is one of the most famous verses in the book of Hosea.

While it is tempting to say that verse 7 simply means that you reap what you sow, I don't think that is what verse 7 is telling us at all. Instead, I think that perhaps what verse 7 is telling us is that sometimes you reap **a great deal more** than you sow! Sometimes you just sow the wind, but you reap the whirlwind!

But there is another way to read verse 7. After all, it is a bit difficult to understand what it means to sow and reap wind. Perhaps the wind and the whirlwind in verse 7 are not the objects of the verbs but are instead describing the conditions in which the sowing and the reaping occur.

If that is what is being said here, then we might translate the phrase this way: "For in wind they sow, and they shall reap in a storm."

And the message in that case would be that things are about to get much worse. If you thought trying to sow seed during a wind-storm was bad, just wait until you try to reap those crops during a hurricane!

Either of those views could be correct, but I favor the first view, which we might call the traditional view - that sometimes you reap a great deal more than you sow!

And as for it being unnatural to sow and reap the wind, that strange use of the wind may just be part of the illustration. After all, elsewhere we see someone who **inherits** wind.

Proverbs 11:29 - Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.

So I think the better view is that verse 7 is telling us that the people were about to reap a whole lot more trouble than they had sown.

I suspect they thought their departures from God were minor matters, and perhaps that God would overlook those faults. But disobedience to God is never a minor matter, and such sins will always catch up with us.

Numbers 32:23 - But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, **and be sure your sin will find you out.**

The second half of verse 7 describes what is being reaped in that whirlwind.

As one would expect, the grain reaped in that whirlwind has no heads and so will yield no flour. The grain has been destroyed by that whirlwind and is no longer useful.

And even if some of that grain could be saved, it wouldn't matter because strangers would devour it. Even that small harvest gathered during a whirlwind would not go to the ones who gathered it; it would be stolen by others.

Here is our question about the end of verse 7 - are we talking about actual grain, or is something else in view here?

We could be talking about actual grain.

Remember that the people were depending on their false fertility god Baal to ensure a good harvest. And so perhaps God is reminding them here who is really behind their harvests - and when God says there would be a bad harvest, that is what would happen. And when God says that strangers would eat their grain, that is what would happen. The people had placed their trust in a powerless false god, and that false god would not save them.

But we could also be talking about something else here with this grain. The useless headless grain could be a metaphor of the useless headless leaders who were leading the people to their destruction.

They thought their leaders would provide them peace and prosperity, but they would enjoy neither of those things. Instead of peace and prosperity, they would experience failure and theft. Their leaders were like headless stalks of grain.

Hosea 8:8

8 Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the nations as a useless vessel.

As we have already seen, Israel's view of itself did not match other's view of Israel. Israel saw itself as a major player in the national politics of its day. Israel talked a big game, but Israel had nothing with which to back up that big talk.

Israel first tried to deal with Assyria, but later Israel tried to deal with Egypt instead. And how did that work out for them? Assyria invaded while Egypt laughed.

The great powers of the day did not see Israel in the same way that Israel saw itself.

And, yes, Israel had once been a great power, and yes, Israel could have been a great power once again. But that was not going to happen apart from God.

When we see Israel strutting around here like it was still a great power, it reminds us of someone else in the Bible.

Judges 16:20-21 - And [Delilah] said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." **But he did not know that the LORD had left him.** And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes and brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles. And he ground at the mill in the prison.

He did not know that the Lord had left him.

Likewise, Israel did not know that God had left them. Their power and their usefulness had come from God, but now that God no longer saw them as his people, Israel was left powerless and useless.

The surrounding nations did not see Israel as a great power. Instead, as verse 8 tells us, they saw Israel as a cup that had been drained of its contents and that was now ready to be discarded.

In fact, Israel had already been swallowed up by those nations. By this time, most of Israel had already been taken over by Assyria, and

only Ephraim remained. And Ephraim would soon be swallowed up as well.

Assyria and Egypt each had the same thing in mind when it came to Israel - drain from that cup all of its wealth and then discard it. Israel had paid Assyria for protection, but Assyria had no interest in providing that protection - and especially now that the cup had been drained and the wealth was gone. There was no longer anything left to protect.

Hosea 8:9a

9a For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey wandering alone;

Rather than going up to God, the people had gone up to Assyria. Rather than turning to God, Israel had turned to Assyria for help and for protection.

Israel wanted to ally itself with a great power, but rather than allying themselves with God, they allied themselves with Assyria.

And how had that worked out for them? Had they found protection? Had they been given help?

No. Instead they found themselves just like a wild donkey wandering alone. They were just like a lonely donkey that had been left to fend for itself with no one to help and no one around even to care what happened to it.

Lesson 30

Hosea 8:9a (Continued)

9a For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey wandering alone;

Assyria was the most powerful earthly kingdom during the days of Hosea, but why? **Why** was Assyria so powerful?

Historians have asked themselves that same question. Here is a quote from the recent book *Assyria: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Empire* by Eckhart Frahm (shown on the handout for Lesson 30):

“When Tiglath-pileser III died in the winter of 727 BC, Assyria was more than twice as large as it had been at the beginning of his reign. The country’s new western border was no longer the Euphrates River but the Mediterranean Sea, and in all other directions the king had made enormous territorial gains as well. **This turn of fortune is nothing but amazing**, especially given that the years of plague and internal unrest prior to Tiglath-pileser’s reign has been joined by other mounting problems.” (Page 130)

“Nothing but amazing,” he says! How can it be explained?

And here is another quote from another secular historian in a recent book about Babylon (also shown on the handout). (The book is about Babylon, but the quote is about Assyria.)

“To supplement their national resources, Assyrians needed to trade, offering both woolen goods produced at home from their flocks, best quality textiles bought from neighboring Babylonia, and commodities like metal ores originally sourced from the mountains to their east. ... **The precise details of how this nation of roving**

merchants became, in the course of little more than a millennium, the most awe-inspiring and feared imperialist power of the ancient world, are not at all clear. Records are sparse. Archaeology has been able to open no more than a few narrow windows, at widely different times, on to the grand saga.”

Listen as the Bible answers those two historians’ questions.

Isaiah 37:21-26 - Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria, this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: [skipping to verse 26]”**Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins...**”

Isaiah 10:5 - Woe to Assyria, **the rod of my anger;** the staff in their hands is **my fury!**

1 Chronicles 5:26 - **So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria,** and he took them into exile.

Isaiah 7:18 - In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, **and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.**

Yes, Assyria was powerful, but that power came from God. Assyria was just a tool that God used for his own purposes. “I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins.” Assyria was just a dog, and when God whistled that dog came running!

The handout gives some other examples (about Greece and Rome) where the Bible provides the answer to questions from historians. Whenever a history book about the time leading up to the first century throws up its hands and can’t answer a question about how something came to be - we can almost always find the answer to that question in the Bible!

Hosea 8:9b-10

9b Ephraim has hired lovers. 10 Though they hire allies among the nations, I will soon gather them up. And the king and princes shall soon writhe because of the tribute.

Here we see a third metaphor describing Israel's faithlessness. First, they were an empty useless cup. Then they were a wild and lonely donkey. And now what are they?

Now, Israel is like a man who seeks love by giving money to prostitutes, but who soon discovers that he has squandered his money and gained no love in return.

We should pause and notice how verses 9 and 10 take the central metaphor in the book of Hosea and turn it around completely.

In most of the book of Hosea, Israel (like Gomer) is the prostitute and the nations are the men hiring that prostitute. But here we see the opposite - the nations are the hired prostitutes, and Israel (here called Ephraim) is the one hiring them.

Should that reversal bother us? Not at all.

In a sense, Israel was the prostitute trying to make herself attractive and to hire herself out to the nations all around her. But in another sense, Israel was seeking to hire out those nations by giving them money and asking them for their favors. The metaphor makes perfect sense either way, and that is why we see it both ways in this book.

And what was God going to do about it? Israel wanted to hire lovers - how would God respond?

God responds by giving Israel exactly what it wanted - and sometimes that is the very worst punishment of all - to give us exactly what we ask for!

Israel wanted these nations as its lover, and so God says, "I will soon gather them up." Israel would get exactly what it wanted, and Israel would be destroyed as a result.

Even now, Israel was suffering. Assyria was exacting a very heavy tribute, and as a result the king and the princes were suffering. And when the leaders are suffering, you can be certain that the people are also suffering.

By the time the suffering finally reaches the **least** vulnerable in society, you can be sure that the **most** vulnerable have already been suffering for a long time. And here the kings and the princes would soon be writhing in pain after God gathered up their customers and turned them against Ephraim.

Hosea 8:11

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

In the previous verses we saw three **metaphors** describing the **political** sins of Israel. In the next few verses, we will see three **ironies** describing the **religious** sins of Israel.

Why three? Keep in mind that the number three is playing an important role in this book. We started off with three children, and we have seen waves of three ever since. And, as we said, one reason for that may be that the kingdom was divided into three parts for much of this time. Here we find three ironies.

We find the first irony in verse 11. The people had built altars to expiate their sin, but those altars had instead led to more sin. The altars **for sinning** (that is, altars to deal with sin) had instead become altars **for sinning** (that is, altars providing an excuse to sin more and more)!

Rather than dealing with their sin, the altars for their false gods had instead become the locations for their immoral worship of their false fertility gods.

And most likely those altars to their false gods were located in the same places where they had previously built true altars.

In fact, we have already seen how Bethel - the place where Jacob built an altar to God - had instead now become a place where the people came to worship their golden calves. That altar **for sinning** had now become an altar **for sinning**.

There is an important lesson for us here. Do we have any altars for sinning that have become alters for sinning? Do we have any altars that are now doing the opposite of what they were intended to do?

Something that was originally intended to keep us from sinning, but that is now causing us to sin?

The answer is yes if we ever find ourselves just going through the motions. The answer is yes if we ever turn our back on God while keeping the rituals of God. The answer is yes if our worship in spirit and truth ever becomes empty and vain.

All of that had happened to Israel in the days of Hosea, and so God told them that their altar for dealing with sin had instead become an altar that caused them to sin. In a book full of reversals, that one may be the worst.

Hosea 8:12

12 Were I to write for him my laws by the ten thousands,
they would be regarded as a strange thing.

In verse 12, we see the second of the three ironies. The first irony was an altar **for** sinning (that is, to deal with sin) that had instead become an altar **for** sinning (that is, to cause more and more sin). Here we see the second irony - the people of God were treating the law of God as if it were some foreign document describing a foreign religion.

The people had moved so far away from the law of God that they no longer recognized it. Instead, when they saw the law of God or heard the law of God, it seemed so strange to them that they thought it must have come from somewhere else and must have been intended for some other people.

And, of all the sad verses in Hosea, verse 12 may be the saddest!

When we think about the wonderful law of God, and about how that law was delivered to the people, and received by the people, and revered by the people, and preserved by the people - to see that law now unrecognized by the people and considered a strange thing by the people - we see just how far they had fallen!

The attitude toward the law of God at the **end** of Israel's history that we see here in verse 12 is about as far as it could possibly be from the attitude toward the law of God that we find at the **beginning** of their history.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The people had gone from “these words that I command you today shall be on your heart,” to this: “Were I to write for him my laws by the ten thousands, they would be regarded as a strange thing.”

Yes, they had the law of God, and yes, God could have given them even more laws - by the ten thousands, in fact, as we see here! But the problem with the people was not a lack of laws. The problem with the people was a lack of knowledge of God, a lack of faithfulness to God, a lack of gratitude to God, and a lack of love for God. The problem was a hard heart that had by now become so hardened that it could not even recognize God’s law.

When the people saw the law of God, they did not see it as having any relation to them. Instead, they saw it as a foreign thing.

They did not read it. They did not follow it. They did not teach it to their children. They treated the law of God in the same way that we today treat the Hindu scriptures or the Koran. They are a strange thing, and they have nothing to do with us!

And is that still a problem today with God’s law? It certainly is in the wider religious world. I think the famous religious pollster, George Gallup, has summed up the problem pretty well: “We revere the Bible, but we don’t read the Bible.”

And what did his polling show about America’s Bible knowledge?

- Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospel writers.
- Few can identify more than two or three of the apostles.
- 60 percent of Americans can’t name even five of the Ten Commandments.

- According to 82% of Americans, “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse.
- At least 12% of American adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife.
- Over half of high school students think that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

In Hosea’s day, the people had substituted the orthodoxy of Baal for the orthodoxy of God’s word. Are we in danger of making such a substitution?

I know it is tempting to say that will never happen to us, but whenever we say such a thing all we have done is alert Satan about a spot where we have no defenses set up. Why guard against something that we believe will never happen to us?

The truth is that if it could happen to **physical** Israel, it can happen to **spiritual** Israel. If we fail to study and love the word of God, then one day we too might see the word of God as a strange thing.

And how would that happen? It would be a slow process.

Rather than being known far and wide as a people who know the book, we would lose that distinctiveness. Instead, we would begin substituting our vague recollections about what the Bible says for what the Bible actually says. And we would substitute our own politically correct cultural opinions about the Bible for the actual words of the Bible. **That is happening all around us today! Do we think we are immune?**

But do we need to know it all? Can’t we can know what we need to know about the Bible without worrying about all of those details?

Is that the attitude of someone who **delights** in the law of God? In fact, is there anything in Psalm 119 that tells us we should ever have that attitude about the Bible?

Psalm 119:159-160 - Consider how I love your precepts!
Give me life according to your steadfast love. The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

Do I need to know everything about the Bible to be pleasing to God?
No.

Do I need to **want to know** everything about the Bible to be pleasing to God? That is a very different question!

If I have grown tired of God's word, or if I think I know all I ever need to know about God's word, it is difficult to see how God would be pleased with me.

I think we see in King David the attitude that God wants us all to have about his word.

Psalm 119:97 - Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

And anyone who has that attitude about the Bible wants to know all about it!

Hosea 8:13

13 As for my sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but the LORD does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.

In verse 13, we see the third of our three ironies. The people sacrificed to God to obtain a certain outcome, but their sacrifices instead achieved for them the opposite outcome.

As we have said, the people had rejected God, but they had kept the rituals of God. Earlier, in Hosea 2:11, we saw that they were still keeping the feast days and the Sabbath days. And here we see that they were still making their sacrificial offerings.

In short, they were still going through all the motions. They were trying to cover all their bases. If one God was good, then many gods must be better.

They were like the Greeks in Acts 17 who were fearful of leaving some unknown god out, unintentionally bringing that god's wrath against them. The people here, like those Greeks in Acts 17, had replaced religion with superstition.

And how did that work out for the people? God had earlier told them what would happen if they mixed the true worship of the one true God with their false superstitious worship of their false gods.

Deuteronomy 28:64 - And the LORD will **scatter** you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

Exodus 23:32-33 - You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a **snare** to you.

And here we see that snare. Here we see that scattering.

Why did they continue to sacrifice to God even while they were worshipping Baal? Because they wanted protection and bounty from God, as well as from all of their false gods. That was the outcome they wanted, but that is not the outcome they obtained.

Instead, as we read in verse 13, God did not accept their sacrifices. And instead of the protection they sought, what they received was punishment. Instead of forgiveness of their sin, God said he would remember their iniquity. Instead of freedom from bondage, God said they would be returned to bondage.

Let's look at two more issues about verse 13 before we move on.

First, why do we see in verse 13 both first person and third person pronouns for God?

“As for **my** sacrificial offerings, they sacrifice meat and eat it, but **the LORD** does not accept them. Now **he** will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.”

Why does God suddenly start talking about himself in the third person?

I think the best answer is that God is parroting back to the people the very words that they had said to him during those rejected sacrifices.

When they made those sacrifices, the priest likely said: “God has accepted them. He will not remember your iniquities. He will not punish you for your sins. He brought you out of Egypt.”

But none of those promises was true. Those priests had it all exactly backwards. What those priests **should** have been saying about those sacrifices is what God says here: “The LORD does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.”

What the priests were telling the people was the exact opposite of the truth. It was the opposite of what God tells the people here.

God in verse 13 is, in effect, taking the falsehoods from the mouths of those priests and replacing them with the truth. And I think that is why we suddenly see God talking about himself in the third person.

Second, what is meant in verse 13 by the promise that “they shall return to Egypt”?

Yes, some of the people fled to Egypt, but most of the people were carried off, not by Egypt, but by Assyria. Most of them did not return to Egypt. So why then does verse 13 say that they shall return to Egypt?

To any Israelite, the word “Egypt” meant one thing - bondage. The Jews had once been in literal bondage in Egypt, and from that time on the name “Egypt” could be used figuratively to depict another bondage.

We see something similar with Babylon. As with Egypt, the people of God were also held captive by Babylon, and so “Babylon” was later used to depict other examples of bondage.

But how do we know that? How do we know that Egypt in verse 13 is not literal Egypt? We know that because Hosea tells us that.

Here in verse 13 we read that they **shall return** to Egypt. What do we read in Hosea 11? We read the opposite.

Hosea 11:5 - They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

Here in Hosea 8:13 we see the symbol. Later in Hosea 11:5 we see the explanation for the symbol. The bondage this time would come from Assyria rather than from Egypt, but it would be just as if they were heading back to Egypt.

And again, think about how sad that statement is. God had led this same people up out of Egypt - setting them free and giving them his wonderful law.

And now? Now, they had turned their back on God and on his word; they saw his wonderful law as some foreign document that was unrelated to them; and they were heading into Assyrian bondage just as surely as if they were all heading right back into Egypt bondage.

We see in Hosea both a reminder of the literal exodus out of Egyptian bondage and also the figurative return to Egyptian bondage (with Assyria playing the role of Egypt).

Hosea 8:14

14 For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; so I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour her strongholds.

There is always a temptation to trust in someone or something other than God. And perhaps we think we can continue to trust in God while we also turn to someone or something else - to hedge our bets, so to speak. The Bible has many warnings against such an attitude.

- The Bible warns us not to trust in uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:17).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in ourselves (2 Corinthians 1:9).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in other people (Jeremiah 9:4).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in lying words (Jeremiah 7:4).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in our military might (Isaiah 31:1).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in foreign powers (Isaiah 30:2).
- The Bible warns us not to trust in princes (Psalm 146:3).

Instead, we must place our trust in God and in God alone.

Psalm 56:11 - In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

Psalm 25:2 - O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.

Psalm 91:2 - I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

But neither Israel nor Judah were doing that in Hosea's day. Instead, they were trusting in their own military power and in their own military fortifications (called palaces and fortified cities in verse 14).

And why were they doing that? Because they had forgotten their Maker.

That is the charge against **Israel** in verse 14, and we can be sure that **Judah** was not far behind. I think that is why Judah is mentioned here - because Judah was following the bad example of her sister, Israel.

And what would be the result? God would send fire against those fortifications, and that fire would devour those strongholds.

What is that promised fire? That fire could be symbolic of the coming invasion by Assyria, but it could also include literal fire that would be used as a weapon during a military siege.

And so we see here in verse 14 the reason why we must trust in God and in God alone. It is because everything else and everyone else will ultimately fail us. It is God and God alone who offers salvation.

Acts 4:12 - Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

And if we ever look elsewhere for our salvation, it must be because we have forgotten our Maker. It must be because we do not know God. Those who know God will always trust in God and in God alone.

Hosea 9:1-2

1 Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. 2 Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them.

What is happening in chapter 9? Most likely what we are seeing here is a message that Hosea delivered to the people at a specific occasion. And what was that specific occasion? I think we will see that it was a failed harvest.

What is the evidence for that view?

The best evidence is in verse 2 - "Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them." That verse is describing a famine caused by a failed harvest.

But the evidence for that view starts with the opening phrase of verse 1: "Rejoice not, O Israel!"

When the harvest was successful, the people were told to rejoice.

Joel 2:23-24 - Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

But here the people are told the opposite - do not rejoice! What could have been a proclamation of joy has instead become a lamentation.

And why is that? Why are the people told not to rejoice? Why are they told not to exult like the peoples?

Verse 1 answers those questions: It is because they have played the whore. It is because they have forsaken God.

And we already know whom the people embraced instead. They left God for Baal. They turned their attention and devotion to a false fertility god.

And what did that false fertility god give the people? Rain? An abundant harvest? Fertility? Prosperity? No - they received none of that, but instead they received the opposite of that.

And what we will see in chapter 9 is that much worse was coming: Famine in verse 2; Military defeat in verse 3; An inability to make suitable offerings to God in verses 4-5; Treachery and death in verse 6.

But all of that started with a failed harvest. All of that started with a failure to obtain the one thing for which they had turned to Baal - fertility. They rejected God, and then bad things happened. Many bad things happened!

And how can we describe that situation? We have already seen the answer to that question.

Hosea 8:7 - For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

What did they sow? They turned to Baal for a good harvest.

And what did they reap? A failed harvest; famine; military defeat; an inability to make suitable offerings to God; treachery; death.

They sowed the wind, but they did not reap the wind. Instead, they reaped a whirlwind!

They sowed seed, but they did not receive the harvest they expected to receive. Instead, God gave them a harvest that they neither expected nor wanted.

Verse 1 tells us something we already knew about Israel - they wanted to be like all of the nations that surrounded them! In fact, that is why they had asked Samuel for their first king, Saul.

1 Samuel 8:5 - Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.

Other nations looked to their fertility gods for fertility. Other nations got good harvests and then rejoiced in those fertility gods.

But not so with Israel. Israel wanted to be like the other nations, but that was not working out too well for Israel. Why? Because God had a plan for Israel. They were supposed to be the special people of God whom God could use to bless the entire world.

They wanted to be like other people, but they were not other people. They had made a covenant with God, and now they had broken that covenant. They were no longer useful to God, and so God was bringing the calamities down upon them that had been promised long ago for those who broke the covenant.

Is there a lesson there for the church? Yes, there is, and Jesus tells us what it is.

Matthew 5:13 - You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

We are not called to be like the people who surround us, and that should never be our goal. And anytime we ever say that we should do this or that just because all the other religious groups around us are doing this or that - then we need to be very careful how we proceed! Why? Because that is precisely how this people in Hosea 9 started out! **They are all doing it - why don't we do it, too?**

Lesson 31

Hosea 9:1-2 (Continued)

1 Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors. 2 Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them.

“You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors.”

That short phrase brings to our minds all that we have already seen in the book of Hosea, going all the way back to God's first command to Hosea.

Hosea 1:2 - When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”

There was a reason why the worship of Baal was so popular - it combined agricultural prosperity with sexual license.

Sexually immoral acts were part of the worship of Baal and were supposedly practiced to bring harvests. But, of course, that was just the excuse. We know the real reason why the people did these things - they did them just to gratify their own evil lusts.

Is that still a problem today? Let me rephrase that question and be more specific - is that still a problem today with people who continue to think of themselves as Christians?

The answer is certainly yes in the denominational world. And to see that, all we need to do is open this week's newspaper. (Can anyone doubt that the 2700 year old book of Hosea is still relevant today?)

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church is meeting right now in Charlotte, North Carolina. And up until this week, here was the Methodist Church's official position on sexuality:

“Sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.”

But that all changed this past week. Here is the new position of the Methodist Church on sexuality as approved by 75% of those voting:

“We affirm human sexuality as a sacred gift and acknowledge that sexual intimacy contributes to fostering the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of individuals and to nurturing healthy sexual relationships that are grounded in love, care and respect.”

That new statement has a lot more words than the old statement, but the thing to notice is not the words they added, but rather the words they left out. Monogamous? Gone. Heterosexual? Gone. Marriage? Gone.

And, in case anyone had any doubts about where they were headed with that new statement, the next thing they did was to repeal their ban against ordaining active homosexuals into their clergy. And that proposal passed with 93% approval.

When we see that, it becomes very clear that the worship of Baal is still around today. The world is still full of people who call themselves the people of God but who are instead really the people of Baal. There are still many people around today who have loved a prostitute's wages on all the threshing floors.

But why is that true? The answer to that question is also still the same. Why did the Methodists make that change? Why did they draw a line through “monogamous, heterosexual marriage”? Why are they ordaining active homosexuals?

Can there be any other answer than the one we saw earlier with the people of Hosea's day? They did it to gratify their own evil lusts.

They are among “those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:10). And yet they claim to be the people of God - as did the people of Hosea's day. Remember

what they said in Hosea 8:2 - "To me they cry, 'My God, we ... know you!'"

"You have loved a prostitute's wages on all threshing floors."

That phrase here at the end of verse 1 certainly refers to the immoral acts that the people literally did on the threshing floors in their worship of Baal, but I think that phrase also refers to Israel's political prostitution with the foreign nations that surrounded them - the nations from which they adopted those false gods, and the nations in which they now placed their trust.

Israel wanted to be just like those nations - but they would not be just like them. Instead, Assyria would invade them, and Egypt would laugh at them. And God would reject them as his people.

And as for those today who believe they can gratify their evil lusts and be pleasing to God, they need to listen to Jesus' warning.

Matthew 7:21 - Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

And what is God's will when it comes to sexuality? Nothing in the Bible is clearer than the answer to that question.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For **this is the will of God**, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles **who do not know God.**

And with that final phrase, Paul brings us back to a primary theme of the book of Hosea - knowledge of God.

And the Methodists or anyone else can vote on that all day long. The entire world can take a vote - and God could lose that vote 7 billion to nothing! It wouldn't make any difference. The truth is not determined by the vote of man.

Romans 3:4 - Let God be true though every one were a liar.

Hosea 9:3

3 They shall not remain in the land of the LORD, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria.

The jump from verse 2 to verse 3 may seem abrupt to us.

We were just looking at a failed harvest - how is it that we suddenly find ourselves looking at a military defeat? It might seem to some like there should have been a few more verses in between verse 2 and verse 3!

But that view of verse 3 is the modern view of the situation.

In our world, a famine is bad, but we don't automatically associate a famine with a military defeat. But in the ancient world, a failed harvest was not just bad - it was devastating. And most often, other nations would show up to take advantage of the weakness that always followed a failed harvest.

I think we see that fact all the way back in Deuteronomy 28, a chapter to which the text of Hosea has frequently alluded in reminding the people that the curses they were now experiencing were curses that had been promised long ago to those who broke their covenant with God.

Deuteronomy 28:38-41 - You shall carry much seed into the field **and shall gather in little**, for the locust shall consume it. You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but **you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes**, for the worm shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, **for your olives shall drop off**. You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, **for they shall go into captivity**.

There is that same abruptness that we see here in Hosea 9! In Deuteronomy 28, we see a failed harvest in verses 38-40, and then what do we see in the very next verse? We see military invasion and captivity.

That was the way of the ancient world - and that was also the way that was promised to those who broke the covenant. Famine followed quickly by captivity.

But where would they go? Egypt or Assyria? The answer is both.

Some of the people literally returned to Egypt when Hoshea, the final king of Israel, switched his allegiance to Egypt. God had led them out of Egyptian captivity at the beginning of their history, and now at the end of their history they were looking to Egypt (rather than to God) to rescue them from Assyria.

So, yes, when verse 3 tells us that “Ephraim shall return to Egypt,” we know that Ephraim literally did just that when they returned to Egypt for help rather than returning to God.

But, as we have already seen, Ephraim also **figuratively** returned to Egypt. To any Jew, Egypt meant one thing - bondage. They had been in Egyptian bondage for centuries before God rescued them.

And now, they were about to go back into bondage - not Egyptian bondage this time, but Assyrian bondage as verse 3 tells us: “they shall eat unclean food in **Assyria**.” And that **literal** return to **Assyria** was a **figurative** return to **Egypt**.

And whether it was Egypt or Assyria, one thing was absolutely clear: “they shall not remain in the land of the LORD.”

God was evicting them from their promised land. They had broken their covenant, and so God was removing them from the land. We may have problems with squatters today, but not so with God! God knows how to deal with squatters! “They shall not remain in the land of the LORD!”

Hosea 9:4

4 They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. It shall be like mourners' bread to them; all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD.

As we have already seen, while the people had rejected God, they had not rejected the rituals of God. They were still going through the motions even after they had left God for Baal. We saw that back in chapter 8.

Hosea 8:13 - As for my sacrificial offerings, **they sacrifice** meat and eat it, but the LORD does not accept them.

And here we see the same thing. They offer their sacrifices, but God does not accept them.

But why? Why does God not accept their sacrifices?

Jesus answered that question when he spoke to the woman at the well - a woman who, as a Samaritan, was a descendant of the very same people who are being described here in Hosea 9:4. And what did Jesus tell that Samaritan woman?

John 4:23-24 - But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

The people here in Hosea 9 were going through the motions. To an outside observer who could not see into their hearts, it might have even looked as if they were actually worshipping God - but they were not.

Their hearts were far away from God. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." And these people were doing neither - they were not worshipping God in spirit, and they were not worshipping God in truth.

But it sure looked to others like they were! Perhaps it did - but how we look to others is not the test and has never been the test.

1 Samuel 16:7 - For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

2 Corinthians 10:18 - For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

Galatians 1:10 - For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Here in verse 4 we see the only view that mattered - how God viewed their sacrifices: "Their sacrifices shall not please him."

And, in fact, those sacrifices that were meant to remove their defilement were instead having the opposite effect - "all who eat of it shall be defiled."

The bread they offered to God was unclean - just like "mourner's bread." Anyone who ate bread near a dead body was unclean - and both they and that bread were unfit as an offering to God.

Deuteronomy 26:14 - **I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead.** I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me.

The sacrifices offered by the people in Hosea 9 were just like bread that had been eaten while someone was mourning or that had been offered to the dead. It was unclean, and the people were unclean.

And what was the best evidence of that? Verse 4 tell us: "for their bread shall be **for their hunger only**."

That bread they were offering to God was really just bread that they were offering to themselves. It was for their hunger only.

And isn't that still today the surest sign of false worship?

Turn on the TV some Sunday morning and tell me what you see. Don't you usually just see a big audience sitting back and watching the show? And don't you see a show that is intended only to satisfy that audience and keep them coming back for more? A big show intended only to gratify their lusts?

"For their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD."

When we gather to worship God, we are not the audience! God is the audience. And when we gather to worship God, our goal is not to please ourselves. We are here to please God.

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” That was true in the days of Hosea. That was true in the first century. And that is still true 2000 years later. That has always been true.

And Jesus did not say that we **should** worship in spirit and in truth. Jesus said that we **must** worship in spirit and in truth. That is the only worship that God will accept.

Hosea 9:5

5 What will you do on the day of the appointed festival,
and on the day of the feast of the LORD?

We know that the people had turned their back on God. But what if we could go back in time and ask them?

Would they agree that they had turned their back on God? Would they admit that they were just going through the motions? Almost certainly, no. They would not agree with or admit to any such thing.

Instead, they likely believed that they were right with God. Yes, they had mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal, but God was still in there somewhere!

They hadn't turned away from God, they would argue. They had just added a few things to the worship of God. They were still keeping the appointed festivals and feasts, as verse 5 tells us. They hadn't taken any festivals for God off the calendar. All they had done was add a few festivals for Baal to the calendar.

And how, we might wonder, could anyone possibly think that is okay? How could anyone possibly believe that they could worship both God and Baal and still be pleasing to God? How? Because they did not know God - that's how!

If they knew God, then they would know what God had said.

Exodus 34:14 - For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

And if they knew God, then they would love God.

Deuteronomy 6:5 - You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

That they neither loved God nor even knew the first thing about God or about the law of God tells us what the book Hosea has already told us over and over - they lacked knowledge of God, and they were being destroyed by their lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

But the ceremonies were still going on! The festivals and the feasts were still taking place! Wouldn't those ceremonies be enough to appease God and keep all of those bad things from happening?

No. They would not. And that is what we see with this question here in verse 5: "What will you do on the day of the appointed festival, and on the day of the feast of the LORD?" **What will you do?**

Would a **famine** care about their festivals and their feasts? Would the **Assyrian army** care about their festivals and their feasts? Would **God** care about their empty festivals and their empty feasts?

Those ceremonies would not save them! Not from a famine, not from an Assyrian, and not from the wrath of God.

The people had forgotten the reason for those ceremonies - they had forgotten the one who was behind those ceremonies - and that lack of knowledge of God meant they had no one to which they could turn when the troubles came. And the troubles were coming very soon!

Hosea 9:6

6 For behold, they are going away from destruction; but Egypt shall gather them; Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.

Here in verse 6 we see another reason why those ceremonies would not save them. Yes, those ceremonies were empty and vain, but they were also impossible to keep! Why? Because very soon the people would not be there to keep them!

What we see in verse 6 are refugees who are going away from destruction - either destruction from the famine or destruction from Assyria, but most likely, at this time, destruction from the famine. As the food disappeared, so did the festivals and the feasts - and eventually so did the people.

And where did the people go? Here we see them going to Egypt. But why? Why is Egypt mentioned here in verse 6?

Some of the people undoubtedly fled to Egypt looking for food, but there may be another reason why Egypt is mentioned here. A reason that points us far back in the history of the Jews.

Genesis 12:10 - Now there was a **famine** in the land. So Abram went down **to Egypt** to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

Genesis 41:57-42:3 - Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the **famine** was severe over all the earth. When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers **went down to buy grain in Egypt**.

The Jews had a long history of heading to Egypt when famine struck. We see that happening early in the history of Israel, and we see that happening again here near the end of their history.

And how would that turn out for the people? Would they be saved by Egypt?

Verse 6 answers that question with good news and bad news. The good news is that Egypt would accept them - but the bad news is that Egypt would also bury them.

"**Memphis** shall bury them." The city of Memphis was located on the west bank of the Nile River about 12 miles south of Cairo. (See

the map on the handout where the city of Memphis is highlighted in yellow.) For most of the period of Biblical history, Memphis was the capital of Egypt and the residence of the pharaohs.

“Memphis shall **bury** them.” Once again there is an important historical allusion here that we shouldn’t miss.

As we know, about all that was left of Israel at this time was the tribe of Ephraim. And who was Ephraim? Ephraim was one of the two sons of Joseph, who was himself one of the twelve sons of Jacob.

And where was Jacob buried? **Not in Egypt!**

Genesis 47:29-30 - And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. **Do not bury me in Egypt**, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.” He answered, “I will do as you have said.”

And where was Joseph buried? **Not in Egypt!** At least not now!

Genesis 50:24-26 - And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, **and you shall carry up my bones from here.**” So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus 13:19 - **Moses took the bones of Joseph with him**, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.”

Hebrews 11:22 - By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites **and gave directions concerning his bones.**

Jacob was **not** left in Egypt. Joseph was **not** left in Egypt. The Jews in the days of Moses were **not** left in Egypt. Later in this very

book we will find a prophecy that the Messiah himself would **not** be left in Egypt (Hosea 11:1).

But what about the people here in verse 6? **They will be left in Egypt!** They will die there, and they will be buried there.

In that short statement (“Memphis shall bury them”) we can see God telling them that they are no longer his people. Unlike Jacob, unlike Joseph, unlike the Jews in the days of Moses, and unlike the Messiah - **they will be left in Egypt!**

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

The people had turned to Baal because they thought Baal was the god of fertility. And what did they receive in return? They got back only nettles and thorns! They wanted crops, but they got weeds.

But what does it mean that the nettles would possess their silver and the thorns will be in their tents?

The Hebrew is difficult, but I think the message is clear: they would lose their possessions and their homes.

In fact, that they are living in tents tells us they have already lost their homes - and now they are going to lose even their tents as well! In short, very bad times were ahead for them.

Their silver would be possessed by nettles - either meaning that the silver would be left in the wilderness or possibly being used as a metaphor for the robbers who would take that silver away from the people as they traveled to Egypt.

And the tents that the people lived in while they traveled would be left behind when they fled from those robbers or when they died.

And, as for that silver, we again see an important historical parallel here that we should not overlook. What happened when the people left Egyptian bondage?

Exodus 12:35-36 - The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

When the people left Egypt, they plundered the Egyptians. And now? Now, when the people return to Egypt, the Egyptians will plunder them.

What we see in verse 6 is yet another reversal for Israel.

- Instead of leaving Egypt, they are returning to Egypt.
- Instead of not being left in Egypt, they will be left in Egypt.
- Instead of plundering the Egyptians, the Egyptians will plunder them.

This entire text from Hosea can be viewed as a reversal of the exodus. God is putting this people back where he found them!

That flight from Egyptian bondage was in many ways the beginning of their history as the people of God, and now at the end of that history (at least, for the northern tribes) we see a reversal of the exodus.

Hosea 9:7

7 The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

Here is how one commentator introduces his comments on verses 7-9:

“Once again Hosea has taxed translators to the limit with his elliptical style, a style that is at the same time both allusive and elusive.”

So perhaps we should proceed with some additional caution!

Let's start with the easy part - what are the days of punishment and the days of recompense that are said in verse 7 to have come?

I think we already know the answers to those questions. The days of punishment and the days of recompense are the days of famine and warfare that the people were at this time already experiencing.

Their crops had failed. Their appeal to Egypt had failed. Their reliance on Assyria for safety had failed. And verse 7 confirms what we have already been told - these events were happening as a punishment sent by God. These events were the curses that had been promised in Deuteronomy 28 for those who broke their covenant with God, as these people had done.

And in a book in which knowledge is a central theme, that third phrase in verse 7 is chilling: “**Israel shall know it!**”

Israel may not have known God - but Israel would know the punishments sent by God! Israel would know the days of recompense!

Lesson 32

Hosea 9:7 (Continued)

7 The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.

Last week, we looked at the first half of verse 7, which is the easy part of the verse. Now, with the phrase at the end of verse 7, we have reached the difficult part of this verse. What does that phrase mean?

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

Is Hosea telling the people that he is a fool? No. I think the opposite is true. I think the people are calling Hosea a fool. I think Hosea is quoting them here.

And after all that we have seen in this book about Gomer and about her three children and about their strange names, we might even understand why some of the people might have called Hosea a fool. But Hosea was not a fool - Hosea was obeying God and was speaking the words of God to the people.

Even today, when we obey God and proclaim the word of God, some will think us a fool. But those who are really foolish are the ones who disobey God and who ignore his word.

Romans 1:21 - For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, **and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

I think the people thought Hosea was a fool and a mad man, and I suspect they not only **thought** that, but they also **said** that.

And, I suspect that view of the prophets as being crazy was not limited to Hosea. If so, then the phrase we see here in verse 7 may have been a popular taunt directed against all of the prophets of God by the people: “the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad.”

If that is what is going on here, then what is Hosea saying in verse 7?

I think what Hosea is saying is this: “Yes. You’re right! The prophets are crazy. But you have driven us crazy with your great sin and your great hatred!”

In short, I think what Hosea is doing in verse 7 is taking a taunt that he had likely heard many times from the people and is turning that taunt around to use against those who were saying it. “If I am a madman, as you say, it is because of your great iniquity and your great hatred!”

And I think that view of this verse is confirmed by the next verse.

Hosea 9:8

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

Verse 8 confirms what we already knew - the prophet of God was no fool! Yes, he may have been called a fool and a madman, but he was neither. Instead, verse 8 tells us that the prophet is “the watchman of Ephraim with my God!”

But what does that mean? What is a “watchman of Ephraim”?

We can let another prophet answer that question for us.

Ezekiel 33:7 - So you, son of man, I have made a **watchman** for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

One of the primary roles of a prophet in the Old Testament was to be watchman for the people.

The prophets would look for warning signs of danger and then blow their trumpets to awaken and warn the people. That is what a literal watchman did, and that is what the prophets figuratively did when they relayed the warnings they received from God to warn the people about the errors of their way and the punishments that were coming if they did not repent.

Hosea, like Ezekiel, was certainly a watchman. In fact, Hosea was Israel's final watchman. But, as with the prophets that preceded Hosea, his warnings were ignored.

When the people were awakened by Hosea's trumpet call, they just rolled over and went back to sleep. That is the attitude we have seen from Ephraim all throughout this book.

The reference to "my God" in that opening phrase of verse 8 tells us that Hosea is using the word "prophet" to include, not only himself, but all of the other prophets sent from God to warn the northern tribes.

They were all watchman of Ephraim with my (Hosea's) God. They were not fools. They were not madmen. They were prophets sent by God to warn the very people who were now calling them fools and madmen.

And here is the **key question** of verse 8 - would a prophet sent from God be a **blessing** for such a people? No. A prophet sent from God would be a **snare** to such a people.

And that should not surprise us at all. Why not? Because God says that he himself would be a snare to such a people.

Isaiah 8:13-15 - But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, **a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.** And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; **they shall be snared and taken.**

Yes, that “snare” in Isaiah 8 was directed to Judah, but we already know that the people of Israel were worse than the people of Judah. So if God would be a snare to Judah, we know that God would also be a snare to Israel.

But we also know that the word of God can be a blessing for the people.

Luke 11:28 - But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

What is the difference? How can God be both a blessing and a snare? How can a prophet sent from God be both a blessing and a snare?

The verse from Luke 11 just answered that question: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God **and keep it!**”

It all depends on the listeners. Whether Hosea was a blessing or a snare to someone depended on how that person received Hosea’s message.

Earlier we read Ezekiel 33:7, where the prophet was called a watchman. Let’s read that verse again, but let’s also read verses 8 and 9.

Ezekiel 33:7-9 - So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. **But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.**

If you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his way, then what? Then that warning would not be a blessing for that person, but instead would be a snare.

A person who receives a warning from God and then ignores that warning is worse off than if he had never received that warning at all. An ignored warning is not a blessing, but instead is a snare.

2 Peter 2:21 - For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Blessing or snare? It all depends on the listener. And I think Paul later made that same point.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 - For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

The message was the same. But for some it was a message from death to death, while for others it was a message from life to life.

Here it is the prophet from God who is the snare. I think the KJV translation of verse 8 is better than the ESV: “The watchman of Ephraim was with my God: **but the prophet is a snare of a fowler in all his ways**, and hatred in the house of his God.”

God sent Hosea as a final warning to Israel, and if the people had heeded Hosea, then he would have been a great blessing to them. But the people did not heed Hosea, and so instead of being a great blessing to Israel, Hosea was the final nail in Israel’s coffin.

What about that last phrase in verse 8? “And hatred in the house of his God.”

The “his” in that phrase is the same as the “his” in the previous phrase - they both refer back to the prophet.

So what then is this hatred in the house of the prophet’s God?

To begin, I think the “house of God” here refers to the land of Israel rather than to the temple (which was located in Judah rather than in Israel). We came to that same conclusion back in Hosea 8:1 when we looked at the bird “over the house of the Lord” that was either a vulture or an eagle.

If that view is correct, then verse 8 is telling us that there is hatred in the land. And that does not surprise us at all.

In fact, it was because of that hatred that Hosea was a snare rather than a blessing. The people hated Hosea (calling him a fool and a

madman), and the people hated God (rejecting God in favor of Baal, Assyria, and Egypt).

So what is verse 8 saying? I think it is saying this:

“The prophet is not a fool but rather is a watchman sent by God to warn you. But because you are filled with hatred toward God and toward the prophets of God, those warnings will be for you, not a blessing, but a snare.”

Hosea 9:9

9 They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.

Just how bad were the people of Ephraim? Where would they be placed on a scale of 1 to 10?

Verse 9 answers that question, and verse 9 tells us that the people at this time could not have been any worse. They were as bad as they could possibly be.

That was how far they had fallen. Some have said that there is no bottom to bad, but this people had managed to prove that saying wrong! They had reach rock-bottom when it came to evil!

And how does verse 9 tell us that? It tells us that by comparing these people to the people in the days of Gibeah.

What happened in Gibeah? We looked at that question back in Lesson 22 when we considered Hosea 5:8, which also mentions Gibeah, but let’s review what we said.

Gibeah was the location of a very dark and disturbing event in Israel’s history.

In Judges 19-20, a Levite was taken into a home in Gibeah, but he was then threatened with sexual violence by the locals, who are called “worthless fellows” in Judges 19:22.

But instead of assaulting the Levite, those worthless fellows instead assaulted the Levite’s concubine, and she died. And, as we said back

in Lesson 22, the text seems to suggest that the Levite himself killed his concubine after she had been assaulted.

The Levite then cut her body into twelve pieces and sent the pieces to the tribes of Israel to provoke their outrage. His plan worked so well that it led to a civil war and even more grotesque atrocities.

What verse 9 is telling us is that the people of Hosea's day had fallen to the level of perhaps the most corrupt example from Israel's history.

Gibeah was bad, but things were even worse now than in the days of Gibeah. Why? Because the wickedness now was all across the entire land rather than just limited to the single small town of Gibeah.

And notice who was to blame here.

“They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah.”

The people had not been corrupted by some outside force. Verse 9 tells us that the people had “deeply corrupted themselves.”

And what would happen as a result? “He will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.”

The people may not have known God, but God knew them. And God knew what they had done. And God would remember what they had done. And the punishment for what they had done was coming very soon.

Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, and people have been trying to do the same thing ever since. But no one can hide from God.

Jeremiah 16:17 - For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes.

Hebrews 4:13 - And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hosea 9:10

10 Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Verse 10 begins with two metaphors that each make the same point: Israel in her youth was a source of special delight to God.

It would be rare to find edible grapes in the desert, but if such grapes were ever discovered they would provide a wonderful feast for the weary desert traveler who found them.

Likewise, the very first fig crop of the season would have provided a wonderful feast for people who had not seen any figs at all for almost a year.

These metaphors would have immediately resonated with the people who were listening to Hosea. They knew very well what it meant to find grapes out in the desert. They knew very well what it meant to pick and eat the first fig of the season.

And so they knew very well what they had once meant to God. When God had first found them, it was like finding grapes in the desert. When God first saw them, it was like seeing that first fig of the season.

In the first half of verse 10, God is looking back with fondness to the time when Israel was young. Yes, we know that Israel had always had its problems, but God is remembering the good times here in the first half of the verse.

But those good times had not lasted very long. That is what we see in the second half of verse 10.

“But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.”

We don't know precisely the time God has in mind in the first half of verse 10 when he remembers the good times, but we do know the

timing of the second half of verse 10. We read about the incident at Baal-peor in Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-9 - While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor." And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

That is from Numbers 25. Who do we see in Numbers 24? We see Balaam. Balaam is an obscure character in the Bible, but he is mentioned in eight books of the Bible, including three New Testament books. He has been described as a false prophet who spoke the truth!

And what had just happened in Numbers 24? Balaam had failed in his efforts to bring a curse down upon the people.

And so what did the people do in the next chapter, Numbers 25? They brought down a curse upon themselves at Baal-peor by having sexual relations with the sacred prostitutes of Baal.

This historical recollection in verse 10 about Baal-peor serves three purposes.

First, this history reminds the people that, although there were some good times in their relation with God, those good times had not lasted very long. These events in Numbers 24-25 had occurred before the people ever reached the promised land.

Second, this history reminds the people of the drastic action that was required to stop immorality and idolatry. The plague at Baal-peor did not end until Phinehas used his spear.

Third, this history is a reminder of the importance of good leaders, and a reminder that, at this time in their history, the leaders were all evil. Back in Numbers 25 the people had Moses as their leader. But here in Hosea 9 there was no Moses. The leaders were all corrupt.

When the people were in Egyptian bondage, God had raised up Moses to lead them. But now, when the people were heading back to bondage, God was just letting them pick their own leaders. There would not be a second Moses for them **at this time**.

And why do I say “at this time”? Because God was planning to give them a second Moses, but he would not appear for another seven centuries.

Deuteronomy 18:15 - The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — it is to him you shall listen.

Verse 10 tells us that the people in the days of Hosea were like the people in Numbers 25 who “consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.”

The “thing of shame” in verse 10 is Baal. In Hebrew, the word “shame” is *boset*, and that is the same word that the Bible sometimes uses in place of the name Baal. For example, Ish-baal (meaning, man of Baal) in 1 Chronicles 8:33 is instead called Ish-bosheth (meaning, man of shame) in 2 Samuel 2:8.

As for that final phrase (“and became detestable like the thing they loved”), I think a better translation is that “they become vile, like their love.”

As one commentary explains the Hebrew, “the infinitive construct does not refer to a person or thing that was loved but to the act of loving itself.”

“That is, their love was itself vile; the more they loved the cult and its prostitutes, the more depraved they became. There was a direct relationship between how far a man became involved with Baal Peor and how apostate and decadent he became.”

Their love was itself vile, and the more they loved, the more depraved they became.

Their love was itself vile. That is a very different message from the message that we hear from the world today. How do people today justify so-called homosexual marriage? What do they say?

Well, here is what President Obama said when the Supreme Court decision was announced: “No matter ... how and who you love, America is a place where you can write your own destiny.”

But that was not always what he said on that subject. Here is what Obama said when he was running for president and still needed votes:

“I believe that marriage is the union between a man and a woman. Now, for me as a Christian — for me — for me as a Christian, it is also a sacred union. God’s in the mix.”

And while we are on that topic, Joe Biden voted for the Defense of Marriage Act, which President Clinton signed into law in 1996. That act defined marriage as being only between a man and a woman for purposes of Federal law.

I’m not sure which is a sadder commentary on our times - that these men have all changed their views as quickly as they change their socks - or that these men had to change their views to get elected by the same people who elected them the first time. In less than 20 years, they went from having to **oppose** gay marriage to get elected to instead having to **support** gay marriage to get elected. That is a society in free-fall!

And what does the Bible say? We just read it in Hosea: “They become vile, like their love.” And we also read it in Romans.

Romans 1:26-27 - For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

But how did we go from talking about Baal to talking about so-called homosexual marriage? Isn't that quite a leap? No! That's not a leap at all! It shows us that the worship of Baal hasn't gone anywhere! It is still all around us nearly three millennia after Hosea.

Before we move on, let's say one more thing about Baal-peor. The Psalmist retells that history in Psalm 106.

Psalm 106:28-30 - Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed.

And what does the Psalmist then tell us just a few verses later?

Psalm 106:36-38 - They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.

We could certainly look here at the connection, not just between Baal worship and homosexuality, but also between Baal worship and abortion. But instead let's just pause to note what one commentator called "the hideous paradox of the fertility cult."

A major reason why people turned to a false fertility god in the first place was to give them healthy children, but that same false god then consumed those children in ritual sacrifice.

And just how evil was that? It was so evil that God himself never thought mankind would ever do such a thing!

Jeremiah 32:35 - They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, **nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination**, to cause Judah to sin.

The worship of Baal hasn't gone anywhere, and neither has the worship of Molech. And many people serve those false gods just as much today as did the people did in Hosea's day.

Hosea 9:11-12

11 Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! 12 Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them!

What is Ephraim's glory?

We have asked that question before, and each time we have looked at two possibilities - either it is what Ephraim's glory should have been or it is what Ephraim's glory actually was.

We know what Ephraim's glory should have been - their glory should have been God.

But we also know what Ephraim's glory actually was at this time - their glory was themselves, their false gods, and their foreign alliances.

So which is it here? What is the glory in verse 11 that will fly away like a bird? I think the end of verse 12 answers that question. "Woe to them when I depart from them!"

I think that God is the glory of Ephraim in verse 11 that will fly away like a bird. God will leave them far behind - just as they had left God far behind.

And what would happen when God did that? Verse 12 tells us: "Woe to them!"

And these verses also give us a more detailed answer to that question: they would not have children, and even if they did, the children would not survive.

We should remember here why the people turned to Baal - they thought Baal was the fertility god. They believed that it was Baal who gave them conception, pregnancy, and birth. They were thanking Baal for their healthy, thriving children.

But they were wrong. Those blessings were from God rather than from Baal, and now God was flying away from them like a bird.

And the result? No birth. No pregnancy. No conception. No children.

Should we be concerned that God is striking their children in verse 12?

On one hand, we might argue that God is not striking their children, but rather is just leaving the people on their own when it comes to their children. And so famine and warfare and exile would then take their expected toll. That is, we might argue that God is playing only a passive role here - but that is not what the text says.

Verse 12 is both specific and active: “**I will bereave them** till none is left.” That statement does not leave much room for the view that God’s role here with regard to the children is only passive. In verse 12 God seems to take an active role - I will bereave the parents until none of the children is left. Should that concern us?

There is a subtle point here, but it is an important point that we should not miss.

Did children suffer as a result of this punishment from God? Yes, they did.

Were those suffering children being punished by God? No, they were not.

This is the same point that we find in Ezekiel 18.

Ezekiel 18:2-4 - What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘**The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge**’? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls

are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: **the soul who sins shall die.**

Ezekiel 18:20 - The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

The point there is not that the son would not suffer at all, but rather that the son would not suffer **for the iniquity of the father.**

Sin has consequences - and those consequences often extend to those who are innocent of that sin. We certainly see that today, and it has always been true.

And, I think that fact helps us reconcile what we just read in Ezekiel 18 with what we find in Exodus 34.

Exodus 34:6-7 - The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.**”

Were the children in Exodus 34 being punished for the sin of their father? No. They were not. Ezekiel 18 tells us they were not.

Were the children suffering as a result of the sin of their father? Yes. I think Exodus 34 is telling us that would happen. And that was part of the punishment of the parents - God was telling them that if you sin, then not only will you suffer but your children will also suffer.

Think about the great flood. Why did God destroy the earth with a flood?

Genesis 6:5 - The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Did children die in that great flood? Yes. Were those children being punished by that great flood? No.

And we see the same thing here in Hosea. Did children suffer in the famine and the exile? Yes. Were those children being punished by the famine and the exile? No.

So, yes, sometimes God struck children when he punished their parents. We know that God did that in the great flood, and I think we also see God doing that here in Hosea. Later, we will see it again.

Hosea 13:16 - Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

And, yes, suffering is suffering, and I suspect the subtle distinction we are making here might well have been lost on the children who were suffering. But it was not lost on God - God knows the difference between those who are suffering because of their sin and those who were suffering because of others' sin.

And God is a righteous all-knowledgable all-powerful judge. We can be certain that whatever God does is right.

Lesson 33

Hosea 9:11-12 (Continued)

11 Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! 12 Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them!

One final comment about verses 11-12.

These two verses show us an example of something we have already seen once before in Hosea - a **pseudosorites**.

The word “sorites” refers to a series of propositions in which each conclusion is taken as the subject of the next. It is a chain of syllogisms (A implies B, and then B implies C).

But here we do not have a sorites, but we have a pseudosorites, a false sorites. What do we mean by that?

What we mean is that in the second statement, the subject is not the conclusion of the prior statement (as we would expect with a sorites), but rather is the opposite of the conclusion of the prior statement (which is why it is called a **pseudosorites**).

Look again at verses 11-12:

- No birth, no pregnancy, no conception!
- Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left.

Those verses do not have the form: “X will not happen. And because X will not happen, it follows that Y will happen.” That would be a sorites.

Instead, those verses have this form: “X will not happen. But even if X did happen, Y would happen.” That is a pseudosorites - a *false* sorites.

And we have already seen another pseudosorites in Hosea.

Hosea 8:7 - The standing grain has no heads; it shall yield no flour; **if it were to yield**, strangers would devour it.

But if there will be no children, then why are we told what would happen if there were children? And if there was no yield of flour, then why are we told what would happen if there was a yield of flour?

That we are asking those questions confirms that we are looking at a pseudosorites here in Hosea 9:11-12 and also earlier in Hosea 8:7.

And what is the answer to those questions? The answer is that a pseudosorites is just a rhetorical device. It is used to help the speaker persuade his audience. And that is how it is being used in Hosea - to better convey the message of doom.

Hosea 9:13

13 Ephraim, as I have seen, was like a young palm planted in a meadow; but Ephraim must lead his children out to slaughter.

Commentaries tell us that verse 13 is “extremely difficult” in Hebrew.

As with other difficult texts, many translations solve the problem by changing the Hebrew text so that it becomes easier to translate. (That solution to the difficult Hebrew text reminds me of those students who, when asked a difficult question on an exam, simply create and answer an easier question instead! We need to look for our keys where we dropped them - not where the light is better!)

If we look just at the original Hebrew, then we have a few possible meanings:

- “Ephraim! Just as I saw of Tyre (that it was a fig tree) planted in a meadow, so too, Ephraim [is] to lead out his children to the slayer.”
- “Ephraim! As when I provided for Tyre (that it be) planted in a meadow, so too Ephraim (is) to lead out his children to the slayer.”

When we see those translations, we can see why most translations opt for the easier path. But that easier path requires us to change the Hebrew text, which I think we should avoid unless absolutely necessary.

Also, when we look at those translations of the original Hebrew and compare it with the ESV, we can see just how far apart they are - the ESV translation makes no mention of the city of Tyre! But other translations do mention Tyre:

Hosea 9:13 (ASV) - Ephraim, like as I have seen Tyre, is planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring out his children to the slayer.

So what is verse 13 saying?

I think verse 13 is saying that both Ephraim and Tyre had been placed in very favorable conditions (“planted in a pleasant place”). But now both Ephraim and Tyre were sending their children to the “slayer,” that is to Baal.

By referring to Baal as the slayer, the text is making the point that this god of fertility was really a god of death. Rather than giving the people life, Baal was giving them death.

And, as for Tyre, archaeology confirms that both the city of Tyre and the Phoenicians who lived in that city were notorious for practicing child sacrifice.

In fact, the Phoenicians created the settlement of Carthage in North Africa. And here is a description of what two of those archaeologists found in Carthage:

“[Carthage contains] the largest cemetery of sacrificed humans ever discovered. Child sacrifice took place there almost continuously for a period of nearly 600 years ...
 . Using the density of urns in our excavated area as a

standard, we estimate that as many as 20,000 urns may have been deposited there between 400 and 200 B.C.”

And those same urns containing the remains of sacrificed children in Carthage have also been found in the city of Tyre. Here is how one article describes that find:

“The American University of Beirut published a study in 1991 analyzing artifacts and remains discovered in Tyre that may point to child sacrifice. Of interest are two ... urns whose closest parallel, according to the authors, were found in [Carthage], dated to the eighth century BC. Several of the urns contained human bone fragments, many of which appear to have been incinerated at high temperatures...”

So what then is verse 13 saying? One commentary suggests that it can be paraphrased this way:

“Ephraim! Just as I saw of Tyre that it was well situated like a fig tree planted in a meadow, and yet it became a place of child sacrifice, so too Ephraim, although it was equally well situated, will give its children to the ‘slayer’ — first to their god, Baal, and then to the Assyrians.”

And Tyre and Samaria had something else in common - both of those cities fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Hosea 9:14

14 Give them, O LORD – what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Starting back in verse 11, the text has been focused on children, and that subject remains our focus here in verse 14.

And that focus should not surprise us. Baal was the god of fertility, and the people looked to Baal for healthy crops and healthy children. Yes, those things were blessings from God, but the people were not thanking God - instead they were thanking Baal.

And what should the punishment be for that sin? What is the suitable punishment for a people who receive gifts from God but who then thank Baal for those gifts?

That is Hosea's question in verse 14: "Give them, O LORD – **what will you give?**"

And the answer? The answer is that God would take back his gifts. "Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts."

If they think Baal is the god of fertility, then let's see if Baal will give them healthy crops and healthy children. Let's see what that lifeless piece of stone will provide for them. The people are about to find that out.

So far in Hosea we have seen a number of reversals. Good things that happened to Israel or that were promised to Israel at the beginning of their history have now been reversed at the end of their history. Here in verse 14 we see another such reversal.

Verse 14 is a reversal of the great blessing that Jacob gave to Ephraim's father, Joseph, in Genesis 49.

Genesis 49:22-25 - Joseph is **a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring**; his branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, **blessings of the breasts and of the womb**.

"Blessings of the breasts and of the womb." That is the opposite of what we see here in verse 14: "Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts." That blessing for Joseph from Genesis 49 has now been reversed for Ephraim, Joseph's son.

Hosea 9:15

15 Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. 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.

We looked at the history of Gilgal in Lesson 19 when we looked at Hosea 4:15 (“Enter not into Gilgal”). Let’s review what we said in that lesson.

Gilgal (likely meaning Circle of Stones) was a place of great significance in the spiritual history of Israel.

- It was in Gilgal that Joshua set up his first base of operations after crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 4:18-20).
- And it was in Gilgal that the people were circumcised prior to their first passover in Canaan (Joshua 5:7-9).
- It was in Gilgal that the kingdom was renewed under Samuel and King Saul (1 Samuel 11:14-15).
- The people of Judah welcomed David back at Gilgal after the war with Absalom (2 Samuel 19:15).

So, yes, Gilgal had great significance for God’s people, but that significance had long been forgotten by the days of Hosea.

In fact, we also see warnings about Gilgal in Amos (who, we recall, was the southern prophet who preached in the north at the same time as Hosea).

Amos 4:4 - Come to Bethel, and transgress; **to Gilgal, and multiply transgression**; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days.

Amos 5:4-5 - For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and **do not enter into Gilgal** or cross over to Beersheba; **for Gilgal shall surely go into exile**, and Bethel shall come to nothing.”

As one commentary described Gilgal, “it went from being a shrine for pilgrims to a center of apostasy.” Gilgal had an illustrious history for the people of God - but that had all changed. Gilgal had experienced a reversal.

Now, having reviewed the history of Gilgal from its honorable past to its ignoble present, here is our question: **does Gilgal remind us of anything?** Is there anything else that we have seen in Hosea that had an illustrious past but that was now dishonorable?

And, of course, the answer is yes - the city of Gilgal reminds us of the nation of Israel. And, in fact, that is the point of verse 15.

As it turns out, every evil thing in Israel was preceded by that same evil thing in Gilgal. "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal." Both Gilgal and Israel had fallen from a great height.

The next phrase from God in verse 15 hits us with a jolt: "**there I began to hate them.**" What does that mean? I thought God so loved the world! I thought God hated the sin but loved the sinner!

First, that phrase in verse 15 does not contradict God's love for the world. What is happening here in Hosea 9 is happening **because** of God's love for the world, not in spite of that love. We know that God loves everyone because the Bible tells us that he does (John 3:16) and because the Bible shows us over and over again that he does.

But, second, verse 15 tells us very plainly that God began to **hate** Israel at Gilgal.

So, putting those two points together, we know that this hatred in verse 15 somehow coexists with the love that we know God has for each person.

How, then, do we figure out what is meant by the hatred in verse 15? We look at the context.

The context of the book of Hosea is the life of Hosea - it is Hosea's marriage to Gomer and the three children that Gomer then had - Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine. And the context is how those events that Hosea experienced in dealing with Gomer mirror the events that God experienced in dealing with Israel.

Think for a moment about a relationship that breaks down. It might be a marriage relationship, or perhaps it is a business relationship. But think about a relationship that starts out great but ends in a dissolution of that relationship.

When did that relationship change? When did it stop being a great relationship? I suspect that for many and perhaps for most such relationships there was some specific event that was the tipping point.

Prior to that specific event, the relationship could be described as great, but after that specific event, it could no longer be described that way. The relationship may not have ended with that event - but that event was the beginning of the end for that relationship.

I think that is what happened in God's relationship with Israel, and I think verse 15 is telling us **where** that event happened - in Gilgal. "There I began to hate them." That is where the relationship changed.

The text does not tell us **what** happened or **when** it happened, but the text tells us **where** it happened. But, with the location as our only clue, can we figure out **what** happened and **when**? Perhaps we can.

Listen to this event from the life of King Saul that happened in Gilgal, and think about what it has in common with the themes we have seen in Hosea.

1 Samuel 15:12-21 - And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on **and went down to Gilgal.**" And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." And Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?" Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction." Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night." And he said to him, "Speak." And Samuel said, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of

the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God **in Gilgal.**” And Samuel said, “**Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.** For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. **Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.**”

Don't those final statements by Samuel to King Saul remind us of things we have read in Hosea?

Hosea 6:6 - For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 4:6 - My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.

Doesn't that sad event from the life of King Saul mirror some of the key themes of Hosea? A lack of knowledge of God? A rejection of the word of God? A misunderstanding of the worship that God demands? Disobedience prompted by earthly desires?

Was that event in the life of Saul perhaps the point where God knew that his relationship with Israel had gone off the rails? Was that when God began to hate them?

We know **where** that happened, but we are not told **when** that happened. But perhaps 1 Samuel 15 shows us **when** it happened.

And whether it happened in 1 Samuel 15 or at some other time in the history of Gilgal, the fact that it happened at all is incredibly sad.

We are talking here about the chosen people of God - a people whom God had rescued out of Egyptian bondage, a people who had been given the great law of God, and a people who had received the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

God's relationship with that people could not have started off any better, but now that relationship was over. Rather than being God's special chosen people, God now said they were not loved and not mine. And here, God goes further - not only are they not loved, but they are hated.

What is the saddest statement in the entire book of Hosea? Perhaps it is this one: "there I began to hate them."

And verse 15 continues:

"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."

I think the second half of verse 15 confirms what we just said about the first half of verse 14.

- We are looking here at a breakdown in a relationship between God and his people similar to a breakdown in a relationship between a husband and wife - "I will drive them out of my house."
- The hatred in verse 15 is describing the breakdown of that relationship - "I will love them no more."
- And the focus on Gilgal points back to the disobedience of Saul, Israel's first king - "all their princes are rebels."

Hosea 9:16

16 Ephraim is stricken; their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit. Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death.

Verse 16 echoes verses 11-13, and what we said about those verses also applies here.

Ephraim is stricken. Why? Because everything that Ephraim sought from Baal is being taken away by God. Rather than receiving fertility, the people are receiving failed crops and dead children.

We were just jolted by a statement from God in verse 15, and now we are jolted again by a statement from God in verse 16:

“Even though they give birth, I will put their beloved children to death.”

It is statements such as that one that cause some to conclude that the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of New Testament. But we know that is not correct.

There is one God, and God's nature is unchanging. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. And God is both a God of wrath and a God of love in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

Those today who argue that the God of the Old Testament is not a God of love need to read the Old Testament.

Psalm 36:7 - How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Lamentations 3:22-23 - The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

And, likewise, those who argue today that the God of the New Testament is not a God of wrath need to read the New Testament.

Colossians 3:5-6 - Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

Revelation 6:15-17 - Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to

the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

We need to **know** God. That is, perhaps, the key message of the book of Hosea. And if we think that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament, then we do not know God.

1 John 4:8 - Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

And that is always true of God. God is always love. And if we are ever having trouble understanding something about God (such as here in verse 16), then that should always be our starting point: God is love.

So, with that as our starting point, how do we explain the incredible harshness of the punishment that we see in verse 16? “I will put their beloved children to death.”

And the answer? The answer is this: God is love!

God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus, his own Son, to the world to die on a cross so that we could be saved.

And the disobedience of Israel was a threat to God’s plan. God needed his chosen people to be faithful and to remain faithful so that God could fulfill his promises to Abraham and to David. But the people were not faithful. They were disobedient, and they had cast God and the law of God behind their back.

If God was not love, then he might have overlooked their disobedience. He might have just given up on his earlier promises. He might have said, “I tried, but the people were disobedient, and so I will just give up on this world.”

But that is not what happened. Why not? Because God is love.

God had given up on Israel, but God had not given up on his plan to bless the world. God still had Judah, and so perhaps God punished Israel as harshly as he did so that Judah would learn a lesson.

Whatever the reason, we know that what God did here was done out of his love for this world. And how do we know that? Because God is love!

Hosea 9:17

17 My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.

What is the first thing someone must do to be pleasing to God? What is the first thing we must do if we want to know God? What is the first step in the plan of salvation?

The answers to those three questions are all the same - God wants us to listen to him. The first thing God wants from us is our attention.

Deuteronomy 6:4 - **Hear**, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Deuteronomy 18:15 - The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — it is to him you shall **listen**.

Luke 8:18 - Take heed therefore how ye **hear**.

Luke 9:35 - And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: **hear** him.

Mark 4:23 - If anyone has ears to hear, let him **hear**.

Romans 10:17 - So faith comes from **hearing**, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But the people of Hosea's day were not listening to God. They were reacting to Hosea the same way as God had told Isaiah that they would react to him.

Isaiah 6:10 - Make the heart of this people dull, and **their ears heavy**, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and **hear with their ears**, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

They, like those who stoned Stephen, had stopped up their ears.

Acts 7:57 - But they cried out with a loud voice and **stopped their ears** and rushed together at him.

And what was the result? What was the result of not listening to God? What was the result of not listening to the prophets sent by God? What was the result of not listening to the law of God? Hosea tells us here: “My God will reject them.”

The first half of verse 17 is a restatement of a key theme in this book.

Hosea 4:6 - My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.

People think they can ignore God forever, but they cannot. God will always have the last word, and no one can ignore God forever.

Why were the people here being destroyed? Why had they been rejected by God? Why were they no longer the people of God? Why were they no longer loved by God? Because they had not listened to God. That is the answer we find here in verse 17.

And, yes, it is possible to listen to God and then reject what you heard. And, yes, that would lead to the same result. But in most cases those who listen to God with the right heart will turn to God and obey God. And in all cases the first step to pleasing God is to listen to God. Here the people had refused to take that first step.

Verse 17 ends with another one of those incredibly sad statements that we have been seeing with greater and greater frequency in this book: “they shall be wanderers among the nations.”

Israel had started off as wanderers. In fact, Jacob is called “a wandering Aramean.”

Deuteronomy 26:5 - And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘**A wandering Aramean was my father.** And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.’

And then, after the exodus from Egypt but because of their sin, God made them wander for 40 years.

Numbers 32:13 - And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them **wander in the wilderness** forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the LORD was gone.

But that all changed when they reached their promised land.

Joshua 21:43 - Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and **they settled there**.

And now? We see yet another great reversal. Once again we see God putting them back where and how he found them.

God has evicted them from their promised land, and so once again they will be wanderers among the nations. They will not have any land to call their own.

Lesson 34

Hosea 10:1

1 Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.

The book of Hosea has had nothing good to say about Israel for nine chapters, but now that we have reached chapter 10 it might seem like that has changed. Now, Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. That sounds almost like a compliment!

Yes, it may sound like a compliment, but it is not. I think what we will see is that Israel is described here as a destructive vine that produces fruit only for itself and for its false gods.

A vineyard is a common metaphor in the Bible for the people of God.

Isaiah 5:7 - For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

John 15:5 - I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

We will later find each of those verses very helpful in understanding the vine that we see here in Hosea 10:1.

But, in verse 1, Israel is said to be a “**luxuriant**” vine. What does that mean? This vine sounds great - it is luxuriant, and it is producing fruit! But we don’t have to read very far ahead to find out that this vine is not great at all. Why does verse 1 start off this way?

The answer is that verse 1 might not start off that way at all. Elsewhere in the Bible where we find that same Hebrew word it is translated, not as “luxuriant,” but as “empty” or “void.”

Isaiah 24:1 - Behold, the LORD will **empty** the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

Jeremiah 19:7 - And in this place I will make **void** the plans of Judah and Jerusalem.

So why then does the ESV use the word “luxuriant”? Two reasons: the Greek Septuagint translation uses that word, and (I think) those ESV translators are unable to see how “empty” or “void” could ever be used to describe a vine.

As for the first reason, that argument just moves the question from the ESV to the Septuagint - they are both translations, and both could be wrong in their translation of this word.

As for the second reason, I suspect that the translators with that view of a vine have never met a vine that is well known in the south - the kudzu vine!

That vine has been called “the vine that ate the South!” Wikipedia tells us that it “densely climbs over other plants and trees and grows so rapidly that it smothers and kills them by blocking most of the sunlight and taking root space.”

The Hebrew word meaning “empty” and “void” could easily be used to describe the problems created by such a vine. And, yes, perhaps that is what is meant by the word “luxuriant” - that the vine grows everywhere - but I think the word “destructive” is a better translation for a vine that leaves everything else empty and void. Also, given the context, I think we should expect to see a negative description of this vine rather than a positive description, and “luxuriant” could be mistaken as a positive description.

What does verse 1 tell us that this destructive vine is doing? The ESV says that it “yields its fruit,” but again there is a translation issue.

The Hebrew is better translated “yields fruit **for itself**.” And I think we can say that that view is at least *suggested* by the ESV (“**its** fruit”), but again the ESV could be a bit clearer on that point.

So what then do we have? What we have, as one commentary describes it, is “a destructive vine [that] takes up valuable soil, crowds out productive plants, and gives benefit only to itself and not to its owner.” And that description suddenly sounds a lot like Israel!

“The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.”

I think this second phrase in verse 1 confirms our view of the first phrase.

As we have said, the vine was growing and producing a lot of fruit - but the growth of that vine was a destructive growth, and the fruit from that vine was not being used for any good purpose.

Yes, this vine produced fruit, but the result was just more and more altars to their false gods.

And, yes, the land was producing, but the result of that production was just improved pillars set up for their false gods.

Nothing about this vine was pleasing to God.

Think again about our earlier example - the kudzu vine. From the perspective of the kudzu vine everything looks great - why? **Because the kudzu is growing everywhere!** But from the perspective of the owner of the land, everything looks terrible - why? **Because the kudzu is growing everywhere!**

Verse 1 is like that example. The people would have seen the description in verse 1 as a great thing, but that is not at all how God saw that same description. And if we are not seeing things as God sees them, then we are not seeing things correctly. We could preach an entire sermon about this vine!

Hosea 10:2

2 Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt.
The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.

Verse 2 confirms what we concluded about the vine in verse 1 - it is being described in a negative way. Verse 2 is very clear on that issue: "Their heart is false."

If we view the vine in verse 1 as a luxuriant vine that produces good fruit, then verse 2 doesn't make sense. But if we view the vine in verse 1 as a destructive vine that yields fruit only for itself and not for its owner, then verse 2 makes perfect sense - that destructive vine is a false vine that produces false fruit only for its false gods.

And what will happen to such a vine? The answer to that question has never changed. Jesus answered that question for us.

John 15:5-6 - I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

That's the same answer we see here. The people will bear their guilt, and God will destroy their evil works - their altars and their pillars. "The branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."

Hosea 10:3

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

What do we see in verse 3?

At first, what we see looks almost like repentance or regret - "We have no king for we do not fear the Lord." But, when we read the next phrase ("what could he do for us?"), we very quickly see that there is no repentance or regret in verse 3.

What we see in verse 3 is not repentance or regret, but rather what we see in verse 3 is a rejection of authority.

"We have no king." That is a common refrain from people who have a king but who either don't like him as their king or don't recognize him as their king. We still hear that phrase today - he's not my president!

That phrase “we have no king” means today what it means in Hosea 10 - it is a rejection of authority.

Isaiah described this same time period, and he also described the people’s same rejection of authority.

Isaiah 8:21 - They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and **will speak contemptuously against their king and their God**, and turn their faces upward.

I think historically what we are seeing here in Hosea 10 is the time period after the death of Jeroboam II when the people had four kings and a civil war all within about a year’s time. (That time frame may be a little earlier than what we see in Isaiah, but it is close.) The people likely became very cynical as a result of that turmoil, and they likely said, “we have no king!”

But God was their king, right? And perhaps Hosea himself had said that to them when he heard them say they had no king. And what did the people say in response? I think we see their response in verse 3 - “we do not fear the Lord!” Their rejection of human authority had led them to reject God’s authority.

So what are we saying here? Are we really saying that a rejection of human authority leads to a rejection of God’s authority? Yes, that is exactly what we are saying. And we are saying it because that is what God tells us about a rejection of authority.

Romans 13:1-2 - Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed**, and those who resist will incur judgment.

1 Peter 2:13-14 - Be subject **for the Lord's sake** to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

A rejection of one authority leads to a rejection of other authorities. That is why we honor the authority of our parents; that is why we honor the authority of our earthly rulers; and that is why we honor the authority of our elders.

Yes, we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29), but part of obeying God is respecting the authorities that God has instituted.

Here, it seems that the people had rejected all authority. They rejected the authority of their earthly kings, and they rejected the authority of their heavenly king. They saw themselves as free from all higher authority. But God saw things otherwise - as would the king of Assyria!

And why? Why did they reject that authority? The text answers that question: "A king - what could he do for us?" They rejected authority because they did not see anything in it for themselves. And again, not much has changed in 2700 years!

Hosea 10:4

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

That reading was from the ESV translation. Here is how the NIV translates that same verse.

Hosea 10:4 (NIV) - They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field.

If we read only the NIV we would have the impression that the big problem with the Israelites was that they were litigious! Lawsuit abuse! But I don't think that is right at all.

For starters, there is nothing in the context suggesting that lawsuits were a problem. And, in fact, the historical context of famine and warfare suggests that the time for solving things with lawsuits had likely passed by now.

Also, as for the underlying Hebrew text, one commentary says that the NIV's translation of "lawsuits" in verse 4 is "indefensible." The

Hebrew word is singular, not plural. So unless we want to argue that Hosea had some specific lawsuit in mind, we need to look for another meaning in verse 4.

To figure out what the second half of verse 4 is talking about, let's start with the first half: "They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants."

What does that mean? We know what that means because we have already seen it over and over in the book of Hosea - these people were just going through the motions. They were saying the right things - but there was nothing in their hearts to back up what they were saying.

Their words were just that - words. And those "mere words" resulted in "empty oaths." And, yes, they made covenants - likely a renewal and a restatement of their covenant with God - but those renewed and restated covenants were meaningless. They were not keeping their end of those covenants, and they had no intention of changing. It was all just talk. It was all just hot air.

Now, if that is what the first half of verse 4 is saying, let's look again at the second half of verse 4. And, of course, the first thing we see is that it has nothing to do with lawsuits. There is nothing at all in the first half of verse 4 that would cause us to expect a lawsuit in the second half.

But what does it mean? "So judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field."

I think we can get some help from Isaiah on that question. Back in verse 1, when we first saw this vine, we read a very similar verse from Isaiah 5. Let's read that verse again.

Isaiah 5:7 - For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for **justice**, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

He looked for **justice**. The Hebrew word translated "justice" in Isaiah 5:7 is the same Hebrew word translated "judgment" in Hosea 10:4, and I think the translation should be "justice" in both verses.

If that is correct, then what is Hosea saying here? Hosea is saying the same thing that Isaiah said - God planted a vineyard, and God

wanted to get a certain crop (justice and righteousness), but God instead got a crop that he did not want (bloodshed and an outcry).

And, as usual, what Isaiah says in 100 words, Hosea says in 10 words. Here, Hosea says that justice springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

If the Hebrew text had quotation marks, I think we would see them around the word “justice” in verse 4. I think Hosea is being a bit sarcastic here. Maybe he even used air quotes when he said it!

Hosea assumes that the people are already familiar with the metaphor of the vineyard. He assumes that they understand that they are that vineyard and that God was expecting to reap justice and righteousness. Isaiah had said that, as had likely most or all of the other prophets sent by God.

And so the people would quickly get the message when Hosea described them as a vine and then used the word “justice” to describe what had been produced by that vineyard - “poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.”

Isaiah said: “He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”

Hosea said: “They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so [justice] [*in air quotes*] springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.” The “justice” they produced was not the justice God wanted - instead, it was false justice produced by their false vine.

I think the message is the same in both Isaiah and Hosea - the people are a destructive, deceptive vine that serves only itself and that yields the false fruit of impiety, hypocrisy, and paganism.

God, as the farmer, goes out to his field to reap a good crop from what he has planted, but instead he finds only poisonous plants growing there.

And, once again, there is something very sad in that description of Israel.

In Deuteronomy 32, we find the beautiful song of Moses that he gave to the people shortly before his death. And one thing that Moses described in that song was the sad state of those who were the enemies of God’s people.

Deuteronomy 32:31-33 - For their rock is not as our Rock; **our enemies are by themselves**. For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah; **their grapes are grapes of poison**; their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps.

“Our enemies are by themselves” - what was true of the enemies of Israel was now true of Israel! God had rejected them and thrown them out of the promised land.

“Their grapes are grapes of poison” - again, what was true of the enemies of Israel was now true of Israel! That is what Hosea tells us here in verse 4.

The description that Moses gave of the enemies of God’s people had become instead a description of God’s people! They had experienced a great reversal!

Hosea 10:5-6

5 The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Bethaven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests -- those who rejoiced over it and over its glory -- for it has departed from them. 6 The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

The calf in verse 5 is the same calf that we talked about in Lesson 29 when we looked at Hosea 8:5-6 (“I have spurned your calf, O Samaria”). And we saw an example of such a calf on the Handout for Lesson 28.

And we are once again immediately reminded of a very shameful event in Israel’s history - when Aaron made a golden calf, and the people said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:1-4)

And we also recall how the the northern kingdom began. In 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam made two golden calves and placed them in Bethel and Dan to keep the people from traveling to Jerusalem. And Jeroboam

said, “Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” (1 Kings 12:26-29)

And, if we fast-forward from the days of Moses and from the days of Jeroboam I to the days of King Jehu (whose dynasty had recently ended with Zechariah as prophesied of Hosea 1:4), we see in 2 Kings 10:27-29 that, even after destroying the temples of Baal, Jehu still did not remove those golden calves from Bethel and Dan.

So what does that tell us? What it tells us is that the people of the north had worshipped golden calves from the very beginning of their history. And what it tells us is that in the days of Jehu, almost 1000 years after Moses, the people were still worshipping golden calves!

That golden calf in Bethel is called “the calf of Beth-aven” in verse 5. And we recall that *Beth-aven* means house of emptiness or wickedness, which Hosea sarcastically uses as the name for the city rather than its actual name *Bethel*, which means house of God.

The ESV translation of verse 5 leaves us with the impression that the people were in a panic because their golden calf had been carried off - but I suspect that when Assyria showed up, the people would have much more immediate concerns!

I think a better view is that the end of verse 5 (“for it has departed from them”) should instead be part of verse 6. And I think the beginning of verse 5 is not describing the reaction of the people to the calf being carried off, but is instead describing the false worship of that golden calf.

“The inhabitants of Samaria **tremble** for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people **mourn** for it, and so do its idolatrous priests -- those who **rejoiced** over it and over its glory.”

The key words in that verse are “tremble,” “mourn,” and “rejoice.” And that was all part of the worship of the golden calf.

But I thought the people were worshipping Baal - why do we instead see them worshipping this calf? Here is how one commentary answers that question.

“In Canaanite religion, the bull represented El, the supreme god, as well as Baal, the storm god. Most powerful of all domesticated animals, bull Baal came to rule over his brothers. His consort was Anat, symbolized

by the heifer. She conceived a new bull calf by Baal. According to the myth, when Baal annually succumbed to Death (the god Mot) in the drought of summer, Baal descended and remained in Death's clutches until Anat, the goddess of war, defeated Death and gave birth to the young bull calf, in whom Baal is reborn."

So, when we see the people worshipping a golden calf, they were worshipping Baal.

Verse 5 tells us that the people and their idolatrous priests once rejoiced over Baal, but now they were trembling and mourning for Baal. Why? What caused the rejoicing to become trembling and mourning?

I think the answer is the famine. We have already seen that famine was part of God's judgment against the people, and we know that drought and famine were equated with the death of Baal, who was the storm god and the fertility god.

In fact, that view of Baal explains the reaction from the prophets of Baal that we find in 1 Kings 18 in response to a drought and a famine.

1 Kings 18:28-29 - And they **cried aloud** and **cut themselves** after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they **raved on** until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

I think we see the same reaction here in response to the same thing. As in 1 Kings 18, there is drought and famine. And, as in 1 Kings 18, there is a frenzied response - trembling and mourning.

But that famine and that drought are not the end of the story. That is what verse 6 tells us. Assyria was coming, and Assyria would carry them all away, along with their golden calf.

I think the end of verse 5 is better translated: "Surely it shall go into exile from them."

And then we have verse 6: "The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol."

That verse tells us what happened to the golden calf in Bethel - it was carried off to Assyria as a tribute to the king of Assyria. And I think Hosea 8:6 told us earlier that it would be chopped into pieces, which tells us that (surprise!) the Assyrian king just wanted the gold.

And how would Ephraim and Israel react to that? Verse 6 tells us they would be ashamed. (And recall that if the civil war is over by this time, as seems almost certain, then the designations of Ephraim and Israel are now describing the same people. All that was left of Israel was now Ephraim.)

And why are they ashamed? It is not because they realize that they have failed God, but it is because they realize that their religion has failed them.

They had placed their faith in Baal, and Baal had let them down. That is what the text tells us: “Israel shall be ashamed **of his idol.**” That is not repentance; that is realization. They now understand that they had placed their trust in a god that was powerless to save them - or to even save itself from being chopped up and carted off!

We have one more question before we leave verses 5-6: **what happened to Dan?**

Jeroboam I set the golden calves in both Bethel and Dan, and Jehu allowed the golden calves to remain in both Bethel and Dan - but now all we hear about is Bethel. What happened to the golden calf in Dan?

The answer is that the city of Dan had already been carried off into exile by the Assyrians. That happened during the reign of Pekah (2 Kings 15:29), who was then killed by Hoshea, the final king of Israel (2 Kings 15:30). The remainder of the northern tribes were then carried off under Hoshea’s reign (2 Kings 17:6) after he switched his allegiance to Egypt (2 Kings 17:4).

You can see the locations of Bethel and Dan on the Handout for Lesson 34 - one is far to the north, and the other is far to the south. Jeroboam wanted his false worship to be both false and convenient! And isn’t that always the case!

And recall that Dan was located in the north only because that tribe had fled north after they were unable to keep their portion of the promised land (Joshua 19:47 and Judges 18).

Earlier we said that the civil war was almost certainly over by this time - why do we say that? One reason is because Dan is not mentioned here, and Dan was carried off after the civil war had already ended.

Lesson 35

Hosea 10:7

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

The metaphor in verse 7 is difficult to understand.

In the ESV translation, we are told that the king will perish like a twig on the water. Other translations say that the city of Samaria is destroyed like a twig on the water. But, whether the subject is the city or the king, it is difficult to see how anything could be said to **perish** like a twig or be **destroyed** like a twig. After all, how has such a twig perished? How has it been destroyed? Isn't that twig still a twig?

I think a better translation of verse 7 is this:

“Samaria is being destroyed. **Her king is like a twig** on the surface of water.”

That is, I don't think the twig is describing the destruction, but instead I think the twig is describing the king.

If that is correct, then what is the point of this strange metaphor?

Let's start with this question: What can we say about a twig floating on the water? I think we can say two things about that twig - one, it is **insignificant**, and two, it is **powerless**.

No one cares what happens to that twig. Big things may be happening all around it, but that twig is not itself a big thing, and that twig is not a part of any of the big things that are happening around it. Who would even notice such a twig?

And, another thing about such a twig, it is not in control of where it goes. Instead, that twig is entirely subject to the movements of the

water over which it has no control. That twig is not going where it wants to go; it is going where the water wants it to go.

So this twig on the water is describing something that no one cares about and that is being carried along by forces over which it has no control. And that description suddenly sounds a lot like Samaria and Samaria's king!

I think the point of this metaphor is that the city of Samaria would fall, and there was nothing the king could do to prevent it. The king was insignificant, powerless, and not in control - just like that twig!

Both the city and the king were being carried along just like a twig floating on the water. And neither Assyria nor Egypt would care what happened to them. And, of course, historically that is precisely how events transpired.

Hosea 10:8

8 The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us."

The high places of Aven are the high places of Bethel where the people worshiped their golden calf.

At first, Hosea referred to Bethel (House of God) as Beth-Aven (House of Emptiness or Wickedness), but now Hosea has shortened it further to just Aven. (I think Hosea's motto is never use two words when one will do!)

The promise here is that those high places would be destroyed, and that thorns and thistles would grow on the altars where the people had worshiped their so-called fertility god. Not only was Baal powerless to prevent drought and famine, but Baal was powerless to prevent weeds from growing on his own altars.

The phrase "sin of Israel" in verse 8 is a common description in the Bible for the false shrines in Bethel and Dan and for Jeroboam I, the king who first set them up. In fact, if we do a search for the words "Jeroboam," "sin," and "Israel," we will find 21 verses from 1st and 2nd Kings.

2 Kings 3:3 - Nevertheless, he clung to the sin of **Jeroboam** the son of Nebat, which he made **Israel** to **sin**; he did not depart from it.

Verse 8 ends with the people saying to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us.” We know that things are really bad when the best option we can find is that a mountain would fall on us!

But, we need to pause and say something about this final phrase because it is a phrase that we also find in the New Testament.

Luke 23:26-31 - And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ **Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’** For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Revelation 6:15-17 - Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, **calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”**

When people find such language in the New Testament, we often hear the argument that such language must be describing the end of the world because no other event could ever be described with such language. Only at the end of the world could it ever be said that mountains are falling, they say.

And whether that language in the New Testament is in fact describing the end of the world we will leave to another day. But we can say

something now about the argument that such language can **only** be describing the end of the world.

We know that argument is wrong. Why? Because that same language is being used right here in Hosea to describe something that is most certainly **not** the end of the world. Here in verse 8 that same language is describing the end of Israel in the 8th century BC.

And so here is a Bible study tip for understanding such language in the Bible - and especially in the book of Revelation where we most often hear such argument used. Before we ever say that certain language can **only** describe the end of the world, we should look for whether and how that same language is used elsewhere in the Bible. Very often we will find that the same language is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe something that is **not** the end of the world.

That fact will not answer our question about what is being described in the New Testament, but it will tell us that we need to dig a little deeper to figure that out - and that is never a bad thing! It is amazing how many bad arguments about the Bible can be refuted with just a concordance!

Hosea 10:9

9 From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel;
there they have continued. Shall not the war against the
unjust overtake them in Gibeah?

This is our third time to see Gibeah in the book of Hosea, and we are now quite familiar with that evil city.

As we recall, Gibeah was the city in Judges 19 where a Levite's concubine was assaulted, killed, and chopped up into twelve pieces. And we recall that Gibeah was mentioned earlier in Hosea 5:8 and in Hosea 9:9.

In addition to the depravity of Gibeah that we saw in Hosea 5 and Hosea 9, there may be an additional reason why we see Gibeah again here in Hosea 10. By the time of Hosea, there was a ruined fortress in Gibeah that had once been the home of King Saul. You can see the location of that fortress on the Handout for Lesson 35.

Gibeah was first excavated in 1922, and that Handout also shows a sketch of what was uncovered.

The fortress had a wall some 4 feet thick, ... and a tower. The fortress fell into decay after the reign of David, and it does not seem to have had great military significance during Hosea's lifetime.

Based on that excavation, it seems that the city of Gibeah was destroyed after the events in Judges 19-20, but was then later rebuilt by King Saul to serve as his palace.

1 Samuel 10:26 - Saul also went to **his home at Gibeah**, and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had touched.

Isaiah refers to the city as "Gibeah **of Saul**."

Isaiah 10:29 - They have crossed over the pass; at Geba they lodge for the night; Ramah trembles; **Gibeah of Saul has fled**.

Why then is Gibeah mentioned here in Hosea 10?

One reason is the same reason that we saw twice before in Hosea - Gibeah was a place of great depravity. But I think there is a second reason. Gibeah was also a reminder of the folly of trusting in your own military power instead of trusting in God.

Saul built a great fort in Gibeah. And now where was Saul? And where was that great fort? King Saul had been replaced by the house of David, and King Saul's fort in Gibeah was just a ruin. And the same things were about to happen to Israel.

"From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued."

That phrase looks back at the sordid history of Gibeah, and then it confirms what we already know - that sordid history was not just history. The people were still just as sordid and just as depraved. They were still trusting in themselves rather than in God.

That is what verse 9 means when it says "there they have continued." That might be better translated as "there you remain." Just as it

was in the early days of Gibeah, Israel was still relying on violence and military power rather than relying on God.

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

Israel thought it was safe. Israel thought their military might would save them. Israel thought that Egypt would save them. They were just like King Saul in Gibeah - nothing can touch me here!

But their own version of Gibeah would fare no better than did the actual city of Gibeah. That is the point of the rhetorical question at the end of verse 9.

Hosea 10:10

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

Like Saul behind the walls of his fortress at Gibeah, Israel thought it going to be safe behind the walls of Samaria, but Israel was not safe. God was going to discipline them, and God was going to discipline them at whatever time pleased him.

That is what verse 10 tells us. But verse 10 does have some difficulties.

First, what are the nations (plural) that would be gathered against them?

Although Israel was eventually conquered by the *single* nation of Assyria, this is not the first time we have seen *plural* nations in Hosea.

Hosea 8:8 - Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the **nations** as a useless vessel.

Hosea 9:17 - My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the **nations**.

And we know from our historical review that multiple nations were involved in Israel's fall. In fact, the fall of Samaria occurred after the final king of Israel, Hoshea, rejected Assyria and turned instead to Egypt for help in 2 Kings 17. So that nations in verse 10 may include both Assyria and Egypt.

Another possibility is that the "nations" or "peoples" in verse 10 is describing the nations and the peoples in the Assyrian army. As would later be true of both Babylon and Rome, the Assyrian army was composed of soldiers from the many nations that it had conquered.

However we interpret the word "nations" in verse 10, the point is clear - these nations would all be gathered by God to punish Israel.

Isaiah paints a very vivid picture for us, not with regard to Israel but rather with regard to Judah. He describes a gathering against Judah by showing Assyria and Egypt coming when God whistles for them!

Isaiah 7:17-18 - The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah — the king of Assyria! In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

Yes, the nations were gathering against Israel, but that was not happening because God was powerless to prevent it - that was happening because God was commanding it to happen! Assyria was the dog, and God was using a dog whistle to call that dog!

The second difficult question about verse 10 is what is meant by the end of the verse: "when they are bound up for their double iniquity."

There have been many suggested meanings for this "double iniquity," but I think we can use the context to figure out the most likely meaning.

What is the central image in the book of Hosea? Spiritual adultery.

We saw that image in the opening verses of the book when Hosea was commanded to marry a prostitute, and we have been seeing that same image over and over again in the verses that followed.

And how had Israel been guilty of spiritual adultery? In two ways.

First, they had rejected God, their husband, to instead run after Baal, their false fertility god. And second, they had rejected God, their husband, to instead seek help from the surrounding nations, Assyria and Egypt.

I think those two sins are the two iniquities in verse 10 - the sin of rejecting God in favor of Baal, and the sin of rejecting God in favor of Assyria and Egypt. Both of those sins are examples of spiritual adultery.

Hosea 10:11

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

As one commentary says about Hosea, “there is never a lack of lively imagery in this book.”

To understand verse 11, we first need to look at the wide range of subjects that we find in this verse. We are not at all surprised to see Ephraim, but we also see Judah, and we also see Jacob. Why?

Ephraim, as we know, was what was left of the northern kingdom of Israel at this time. The other tribes had either disappeared long ago or had been carried off by the Assyrians during the reign of Pekah. And Ephraim would soon be carried off itself when the Assyrians came back during the reign of Hoshea to finish what they had started.

Judah, of course, was the southern kingdom. Judah has not been the focus of the book of Hosea, but Judah has been mentioned in passing quite a bit.

What Judah needed to do was learn a lesson from what was happening to Israel. What was happening to Israel could happen to Judah - and, in fact, it did happen to Judah when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon showed up in 586 BC. But the difference was that Judah returned from their exile, while Israel did not.

But isn't that everyone? Why do we also see Jacob mentioned in verse 11?

When we see the name Jacob, we think of the twelve tribes of Israel named after the twelve sons of Jacob. I think what that tells us is that there is a historical perspective at play in verse 11.

We see the current time of Hosea in which the kingdom was divided, and Ephraim and Judah was all that was left of the twelve tribes. And we also see Jacob, which points us back to the days when all twelve tribes still existed.

I think Jacob is mentioned here as a subtle reminder of just how far the people had fallen. They were now down to only two tribes - and really only one and a half tribes because Ephraim, as one of the two sons of Joseph, was only a half-tribe.

Now, with that background, let's go back to the text of verse 11 and see what is being said here about Ephraim, Judah, and Jacob.

Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck.

As we have seen, the people had made calves and worshiped them as their gods. But here God turns that around on them - **God is not the calf, but they are!**

A heifer or a calf performed two kinds of work.

First, they performed **threshing** in which the animal would walk on the harvested stalks to separate the grain from the ear.

And second, they performed **plowing**, in which the animal would be harnessed to a sledge or a plow.

And why did Ephraim love to thresh? Because threshing was much easier than plowing. Unlike threshing, plowing was very hard work.

And so the first thing we learn about Ephraim in verse 11 is that Ephraim had been trained to do the easy work, and Ephraim loved it! Nothing difficult was asked of this trained calf, and the calf did not disappoint.

And, in fact, its ability to do this easy job had another advantage for the calf, perhaps an advantage of which it was not aware - God spared her fair neck! This calf was still alive because it had been trained to thresh, and it was good at that job.

But God had more in mind for this calf than just threshing. God was planning to assign this calf a much harder job. We see that in the phrase “fair neck,” which indicates the strength of the animal rather than its appearance. Something was coming for this calf that would require a strong neck.

And what was that harder job? We see it next in verse 11.

But I will put Ephraim to the yoke.

Ephraim loved threshing, but how would Ephraim feel about plowing? How would Ephraim react when it suddenly found a yoke around its neck?

What is this yoke that God had in mind for Ephraim? And what is the easier job that they started off doing? Let’s start with that second question first.

The easy job that Ephraim loved was to be blessed by God! That was what came from threshing, not only figuratively for the people but also literally for the animal.

Deuteronomy 25:4 - You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

The ox loved threshing because the ox was fed in the process. And likewise Ephraim loved threshing because Ephraim was blessed in the process. Just like that ox!

But Ephraim forgot where those blessings came from - which was most likely **not** like that dumb ox! I suspect that ox knew where its blessings came from, but Ephraim did not. Rather than thanking God, Ephraim was thanking Baal.

And so what was going to happen next? They had failed God with the easy job of threshing - how would they do with the hard job of plowing? And there is a question that answers itself! We know how they would do!

As we have already been told, God was going to withdraw those blessings. And, in fact, that was already happening with the drought and the famine, and it would happen with finality when the Assyrians showed up.

Israel had enjoyed a preferred position as part of the chosen people of God, but now God had renamed them “Not Mine” and “Not

Loved.” As we have repeatedly seen, God was effectively putting them back where he found them. They were figuratively headed back to Egypt!

The days of threshing were over. The days of plowing had arrived.

But the coming hard times were not for Ephraim only.

Judah must plow.

Yes, it was the north and not the south that was carried off into Assyrian exile, but both the north and the south were attacked by Assyria.

The Bible tells us that the Assyrian king Sennacherib attacked Judah in the 14th year of Hezekiah’s reign.

2 Kings 18:13 - In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them.

And, as he had done with Ahaz, the prophet Isaiah came to deliver God’s word to Hezekiah. But, unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah listened to that word, and Hezekiah prayed to God for deliverance.

2 Kings 19:19 - So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.

And, as a result, one of the most amazing things, not just in the Bible, but in all recorded history, happened.

2 Kings 19:35-36 - And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.

God did not allow Assyria to do to Judah what Assyria had done to Israel.

But even so, hard times were in store for Judah just as they were for Israel. “Judah must plow!”

Jacob must harrow for himself.

As for that phrase “for himself” at the end of verse 11 in the ESV, I think the ASV translation is better: “Jacob shall break his clods.”

As we said, this reference to Jacob points us all the way back to the beginning of the people’s history - back when they still had all twelve tribes.

Why is Jacob mentioned here?

We have already seen one reason - it is a subtle reminder of how far the people had fallen. They had fallen from twelve tribes to only one and half tribes!

But I think there is another reason as well - Jacob means everybody else! Ephraim would plow. Judah would plow. And everyone else would plow.

Any Jew who was not from the tribe of Ephraim or from the tribe of Judah would still be included in verse 11 because all of the Jews were from the line of Jacob.

Hosea 10:12

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

Verse 12 is not just one of the most beautiful verses in the book of Hosea, but verse 12 is one of the most beautiful verses in the entire Bible.

And one reason verse 12 is so beautiful is because of its contrast with the verses that surround it.

If there was any point in history where the days of repentance were over, it would be right here. The people had fallen about as far as they could possibly fall, and the Assyrians were knocking at the door. God had given them up as his people, calling them “Not Loved” and “Not Mine,” and God had evicted them from their promised land.

Surely it was now too late for them to ever turn things around! No. It was not too late. That is what verse 12 tells us. Even now, the door

was open for them to return to God and once again be blessed by God.

I think we would have closed the door on this people long before, but I think we often close the door on people a lot quicker than God does.

Yes, God is closing a door here in Hosea, but I think God is closing that door very slowly. God is not slamming it shut as we might do, but rather God is inching that door shut bit by bit, hoping that some will rush through the ever narrowing gap.

I think we see all of that here in verse 12.

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

And if ever there was a time to seek the Lord, this was it. That door was about to close for Israel.

But even then it would not remain closed forever. When Jesus came he would proclaim the good news to a descendant of this very people when he met the woman at the well in John 4.

And what did the people need to do to return to God? They needed to plant righteousness. They needed to reap love. And they needed to break up the hardened ground that their hearts had become.

If they did those things, God would rain righteousness upon them. Yes, there was a drought and a famine, but God promised them rain. And yes, they thought Baal was the storm god, but if they wanted rain, they had to turn to God and only to God. And the door remained open for them to do that.

That is why verse 12 is so beautiful. But that is also why verse 12 is so sad.

Verse 12 is sad because we know that the people did not turn to God even as their entire world was crumbling all around them. Even then, they remained rebellious and disobedient.

Both Isaiah and Paul describe such people.

Isaiah 65:1-5 - I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

Romans 10:20-21 - Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

Lesson 36

Hosea 10:13

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

As we saw last week, verse 12 is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. But verse 12 is also one of the saddest - and we see why in verse 13.

In verse 12 we saw how the people **could** have been had they returned to God. Here in verse 13 we see how the people actually were.

- They were not sowing righteousness, but instead they were plowing iniquity.
- They were not reaping steadfast love, but instead they were reaping injustice.
- They were not enjoying a rain of righteousness from God, but instead they were eating the fruit of lies.

And why? Why were the people like this? Verse 13 answers that question: “Because you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors.”

Rather than trusting in the wisdom of God and in the power of God, they were trusting instead in their own wisdom and in their own power.

And that is always the answer to the question of why people reject God. That was the answer then, that is the answer today, and that was certainly the answer in the first century.

Romans 1:19-23 - For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **Claiming to be wise, they became fools**, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

“Claiming to be wise, they became fools.” If there is a better indictment of our modern world than that, I don’t know what it is. And that was also an indictment of Hosea’s world and of Paul’s world. It is an indictment that goes all the way back to the Garden! “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”

And what is the result of such thinking and such living? What awaits those who reject the wisdom of God? What lies ahead for those who rely on the arm of man rather than the arm of God? The next verse tells us what was awaiting this people - destruction and death.

Hosea 10:14

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

The first word in verse 14 (“therefore”) tells us that verse 14 is the result of verse 13. What we see happening in verse 14 is happening because the people were trusting in their own way and in their own power.

And what do we see in verse 14? We see the Assyrians. The Assyrian army was coming, and soon the people would be experiencing the tumult of war. And those fortresses in which they trusted would all be destroyed.

And how can we describe this great battle? To what can we compare it? Hosea tells us that this great battle will be like when **Shalman** destroyed **Beth-arbel**.

Who is Shalman? And where is Beth-arbel? Let's check our Bible dictionaries.

Shalman: Mentioned by Hosea as the one who destroyed Beth-Arbel (Hosea 10:14).

Beth-Arbel: A city mentioned only in Hosea 10:14 as a place destroyed by an otherwise unknown person named Shalman.

Well, that's disappointing! The Bible dictionaries are not very helpful here. Verse 14 is the only place in the Bible (or elsewhere) where we find either Shalman or Beth-Arbel.

Apparently someone named Shalman had destroyed some city called Beth-Arbel, and that fact was well-known to everyone listening to Hosea - but that event has not otherwise been preserved by history. And, as usual, Hosea doesn't explain himself! There are no footnotes in Hosea!

As for the identity of Shalman, the most common suggestions are that either he is the Assyrian king Shalmaneser, or he is a person named Salamanu of Moab who is mentioned in the Assyrian annals of Tiglath-pileser III.

And as for the city of Beth-Arbel, the most common suggestions are that it is either the city of Irbid, which is located about eighteen miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee, or it is the city of Arbela in Galilee.

We don't know for sure what happened in that city or who did it, but I think we can say that whatever happened there it was a horrible atrocity. Why? Because of the final thing we see in verse 14: "mothers were dashed in pieces with their children."

Something terrible had happened in that city, and everyone listening to Hosea knew all about it - and they were now hearing from Hosea that the same thing would soon be happening to them! That is what the next verse tells us.

Hosea 10:15

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

And why are we now hearing only about the city of **Bethel** rather than about the entirety of the remaining nation of Israel? They were all going into exile - why the sudden focus on Bethel?

I think one reason is because Bethel sounds a lot like Beth-Arbel! I think that may be why the text is using Bethel to represent the entire nation in verse 15. It is yet another reminder of the terrible fate that awaits them all.

But I think another reason Bethel is mentioned here is because, as we have seen, Bethel was where the people went to worship their golden calf. That idolatry was the “great evil” in verse 15, and it was because of that “great evil” that the Assyrians were coming very soon to do to them all what had earlier been done in Beth-Arbel.

As one commentary describes it:

“Throughout the book Bethel and the other shrines are described as places of apostasy, immorality, false piety, and hostility to God. It was the heart of Israel's darkness.”

“At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.”

The people had trusted in their military power, but Chapter 10 ends by telling us that their king would be utterly cut off at dawn. Their king would not do anything to help them because he would not even be around to help them. He would be cut off at dawn, which means he would be cut off at the beginning of the battle.

And the Bible tells us that is precisely what happened with Israel's final king, Hoshea, after the Assyrians invaded.

2 Kings 17:4-5 - But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. **Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the**

king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria,
and for three years he besieged it.

Hoshea was captured and imprisoned **prior** to the invasion and the three year siege of Samaria that followed - just as verse 15 tells us. “**At dawn** the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.”

Things certainly look bleak at the end of Chapter 10. What do we expect to see in Chapter 11? More death? More destruction? More punishment? More bleakness? We might expect that - but what we find instead in the next verse is a wonderful prophecy about Jesus!

Hosea 11:1

1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt
I called my son.

That verse is a prophecy about Jesus. How do we know that? We know that because Matthew, by inspiration, tells us that.

Matthew 2:13-15 - Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. **This was to fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “**Out of Egypt I called my son.**”

We know why Mary and Joseph were told to flee, but why were they told to flee **to Egypt**? Matthew tells us. It “was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

There is an important preliminary point we need to consider about this prophecy before we move on.

We need to consider a very common charge that is made by some against the New Testament - that the New Testament sometimes twists the evidence to make a point.

Some say that the New Testament sometimes lifts verses out of their context in the Old Testament and applies them instead to Jesus. And

if you ever meet such a person, I suspect they may point you first to Hosea 11:1.

Here is how one modern critic describes their position:

It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.

We talked about this viewpoint back in Lesson 24 when we looked at the prophecy of the resurrection in Hosea 6:2, but, unlike that verse, which is only **alluded** to in the New Testament, Hosea 11:1 is **explicitly quoted** in the New Testament.

Did Matthew twist the evidence? The short answer is no, of course he didn't. The same Holy Spirit who inspired Hosea 11:1 also inspired Matthew 2:15, and if the inspired word of God tells us that Hosea 11:1 is a prophecy about Jesus then Hosea 11:1 is a prophecy about Jesus.

For a more detailed response, I will point us back to the class notes from Lesson 24. To summarize what we said there:

- When David wrote the Psalms, was David thinking about a coming Messiah, or was David thinking only about himself and the events of his own time? **Acts 2:29–31** answers that question - David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ!
- Likewise with Isaiah, **John 12:41** tells us that he saw Christ's glory and spoke of him.
- **1 Peter 1:12** tells us that the prophets knew that they were not speaking only about their own times but were instead also speaking about the coming day of the Messiah.
- And in **John 11:47-53** we have a prophecy about Jesus given by someone who had no idea that it was a prophecy about Jesus. We have a prophecy about Jesus that was delivered to an audience who likewise had no idea that it was a prophecy about Jesus. And yet we know with absolute certainty that it was in fact a prophecy about Jesus.

The Handout for Lesson 36 includes an excerpt from an introduction to a commentary on Joel that gives us an excellent overview of these points.

What can we learn from this, and especially from John 11? What we can learn is that God, and God alone, determines whether something is a prophecy about Jesus. Not the speaker, not the hearer, not the context, and not the liberal commentator - but only God and God alone.

And sometimes God gives us those prophecies about his Son in unexpected contexts and from unexpected sources. And sometimes God lets the speaker know that he is prophesying about Jesus, but sometimes he does not.

That prophecy in John 11 tells us that it makes no sense to argue that a verse in the Old Testament cannot be a prophecy about Jesus because it comes from an unexpected source or in an unexpected context. If God tells us that it is a prophecy about Jesus, then that is what it is.

But that does not mean the prophecy is necessarily **only** about Jesus.

There are different ways that the Old Testament presentation of Christ shows itself. The Old Testament includes direct predictive prophecy referring only to Christ, often called rectilinear prophecy. There also are prophecies that have one or more intermediate fulfillments, with Christ as the final, ultimate fulfillment. Finally, there are people, institutions, places, and events that are types or foreshadows of Christ.

I think Hosea 11:1 falls more into that third category - the exodus of Israel from Egypt foreshadowed the return of Christ as a child from Egypt. I think that is what Mathew is telling us - and I think we can see that from the verb tense that is used.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I **called** [past tense] my son."

The statement in Hosea 11:1 was describing a past event (as the past tense tells us) - but Hosea 11:1 was also describing a future event (as

Matthew tells us). We know that is true because God tells us it is true.

Absent that revelation from God about its meaning, it would have been very difficult for us to see that past tense statement in Hosea 11:1 as a prophecy. But that past tense statement was a prophecy, and it was fulfilled by Jesus.

Now, with that background, let's look more closely at the text of verse 1, and let's consider the **two events** that it describes.

Hosea 11:1 - When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Let's first consider the past event described by verse 1.

As we have seen before in Hosea, God in verse 1 is looked back with fondness to the beginning of his relationship with the people of Israel. Verse 1 is describing Israel in its youth - "when Israel was child" - and God says that he "loved him."

Yes, things had now gone very badly off the rails, but that was not always true. God's relationship with Israel had started off very well - God had called them out of Egypt, he had given them his Law, and he had settled them down in their promised land flowing with milk and honey.

And what should Israel have done in response? Israel should have loved God, Israel should have thanked God for the blessings he rained down upon them, Israel should have been loyal to God, Israel should have worshiped God in spirit and in truth, and Israel should have obeyed God.

And perhaps Israel did all of those things early in its history - but now Israel was not doing any of those things. Israel loved Baal, Israel thanked Baal, Israel was loyal to Baal, Israel worshipped Baal, and Israel obeyed Baal. In short, Israel had left God for someone else.

Now, in saying that, we have mixed our metaphors.

Here in verse 1 we see Israel as the **child** of God - but throughout most of Hosea, and especially when it comes to the central theme of Hosea, we see Israel as the **wife** of God.

Should that concern us? Not at all.

Whether mixed or not, the metaphors are just that - metaphors. The point of our central metaphor describing Israel as a faithless and thankless wife could be made just as easily by instead describing Israel with the metaphor of a faithless and thankless son.

Here Israel is described, not as the wife of God, but as the son of God. And God had loved his son and called his son out of Egypt.

And, although Israel is not often referred to as God's son, we do find such a description elsewhere in the Bible - and in the context of the exodus!

Exodus 4:22-23 - Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, **Israel is my firstborn son**, and I say to you, "**Let my son go** that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'

That description of "firstborn son" speaks to Israel's position, Israel's privilege, Israel's family identity, and Israel's inheritance. In short, Israel was the firstborn son of the King, and accordingly Israel had been given every advantage and every privilege. Paul listed their advantages:

Romans 9:4 - They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

But, as we will see, and as we already know, Israel turned its back on all of that. God's son was disobedient and faithless.

Let's now consider the future event described by verse 1.

Yes, Israel was God's son - but Israel was not the **begotten** son of God. There is only one begotten son of God, and that is Jesus.

John 1:14 - And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the **only begotten** of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only begotten** Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

And Jesus and Israel had something in common - they were **both** loved by God and called out of Egypt while still a child.

But that is where the comparison ends.

Israel proved to be **faithless**. But Jesus? He was the just the opposite.

Hebrews 3:5-6 - Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, **but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son**. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 - **But the Lord is faithful**. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

Israel proved to be **disobedient**. But Jesus? He was the just the opposite.

Philippians 2:8 - And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross.

John 6:38 - For I have come down from heaven, **not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me**.

Israel proved to be **thankless**. But Jesus? He was the just the opposite.

Luke 10:21 - In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "**I thank you, Father**, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

So what can we say? What we can say is that Jesus succeeded in everything in which Israel had failed.

Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin**.

1 Peter 2:22 - Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

God the Father had called Israel, his son, out of Egypt - but Israel had proved to be sinful, faithless, disobedient, and thankless.

God the Father also called Jesus, his son, out of Egypt - but (unlike Israel) Jesus was sinless, faithful, obedient, and thankful.

Now, here is a question: was that comparison between Israel and the Messiah a message that was intended for Hosea's listeners? I don't think so.

I don't see how they could have possibly picked up on that message about the **future** from the simple statement of **past** history in verse 1.

So for whom then was that message intended? Us! It was a message for us!

It was a message for the **future** readers of Hosea rather than for the **current** listeners or readers in Hosea's day. Neither we nor anyone else could have known that verse 1 was talking about Jesus until Matthew by inspiration told us that it was.

Yes, those prophets had a message for the people of their own day - but they also had a message for the people of our day. And that should not surprise us because that is precisely how Peter described the Old Testament prophets.

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

We see such a message right here in Hosea 11:1. Verse 1 is a perfect example of what Peter was describing in 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Hosea 11:2

2 The more they were called, the more they went away;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings
to idols.

Here in verse 2 we see, not Jesus, but Israel. Both Jesus and Israel were called out of Egypt, but with Israel, “the more they were called, the more they went away.”

And notice the language here - not that they **started** sacrificing to their false gods, but rather that they **kept** doing that.

Yes, God had looked back with fondness to Israel’s youth - but even in their youth - even while they were waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain with God’s law - even then, they were already sacrificing to their false gods. And they kept doing just that.

And the more God called for them to return, the more they went away from God. Israel was truly a thankless and rebellious child!

And, as with most thankless and rebellious children, it eventually caught up with them. And that was what was happening now. Assyria was coming to carry off that thankless and rebellious child, never to return.

And was God happy about that? Do we see any happiness from God here? Or do we instead see great sadness.

I think we see great sadness, and that I think is how any parent would feel - or at least should feel - when the consequences finally catch up to their rebellious children. If only they had listened!

Verse 2 in the ESV reads: “The more they were called, the more they went away.” And, although not explicit in that translation, I think the intended meaning is that “the more they were called [**by me**], the more they went away [**from me**].”

And that may be what is meant here, but the original Hebrew literally reads: “they called **to them**, that is how they went **from them**.” If that is the correct translation, then what is verse 2 saying?

I think that verse 2 would then be saying, “they [**Israel**] called to them [**Egypt**], that is how they [**Israel**] went from them [**Egypt**].”

And that statement would then be telling us what we already know - that even during the exodus, Israel was already looking back with fondness toward Egypt. Israel called to Egypt even while Israel went from Egypt.

Numbers 11:4-6 - Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

And that view of verse 2 fits the context very well. Why? Because King Hoshea had or was just about to turn to Egypt for help against Assyria! He was also calling to Egypt!

Israel had started off its history by looking to Egypt for its salvation, and now Israel was ending its history by doing exactly the same thing!

Hosea 11:3

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

We haven't said much about Hosea's own family in quite a while, but I think Hosea's family has been in the background of much of what we have been reading. And, I suspect, for Hosea himself, his family was in the foreground.

Here in verse 3 for example, we might wonder whether Hosea is perhaps remembering something about his own life as he recounts this word from God about Ephraim?

We know from Hosea 1:4 that Hosea's first son, Jezreel, was born just a little while before King Zechariah died in 753 BC.

And it seems likely that the events described in these final chapters of Hosea are occurring during the reign of Hoshea, the final king of Israel. And we know that Hoshea began to reign in 732 BC.

So what does that tell us about Hosea's three kids? It means that the oldest child was about 21, and the others were likely still teenagers!

And how had those three kids turned out? What was going on now for Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine? We aren't told, but perhaps - and sadly so - some or all of them had lived up to their strange names.

Is Hosea himself also having some fond remembrances of his own in these verses? Is Hosea remembering what it was like to teach Jezreel how to walk? To lift Not Loved up by her arms to let her know that, in fact, she was loved? We can only speculate.

But what we know for certain is that God felt this way about Ephraim. God remembered when he taught Ephraim how to walk. God remembered when he took Ephraim up by his arms - not "in his (God's) arms" but "by his (Ephraim's) arms" as one would do when teaching a child to walk.

And God remembered healing him - just like a parent might do with a young child who, after learning to walk, has fallen down and skinned his knees.

I retired recently, and one of my projects was to convert about 100 spools of 8mm film from the 1960's to a digital format. As I read these verses, do you know what I picture? I picture God watching old 8mm home videos! There is no sound - just images. And I picture an old grainy soundless video of God teaching Ephraim how to walk! Yes, Ephraim was rebellious, but that had not always been the case. Ephraim had once been a toddler holding his arms up to God.

Can there be any doubt it now? **Isn't Hosea the saddest book in the Bible?**

What about that final phrase in verse 3 - "but they did not know that I healed them." What does that mean?

I think what we see there is a reference back to a specific promise that God made to the people during the exodus.

Exodus 15:26 - "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, **your healer.**"

We know that much of the Law was intended to keep the people healthy, which, of course, was an important concern for a people who had a vital role to play much later in their history as part of God's plan to bless the world.

We could give many examples, but here is a particularly famous example, from an article on the *Apologetics Press* website:

In 1847, an obstetrician named Ignaz Semmelweis was the director of a hospital ward in Vienna, Austria. Many pregnant women checked into his ward, but 18% of them never checked out. One out of every six that received treatment in Semmelweis' ward died of labor fever. ... If a woman delivered a baby using a midwife, then the death fell to only about 3%. Yet if she chose to use the most advanced medical knowledge and facilities of the day, her chance of dying skyrocketed immensely!

Semmelweis tried everything to curb the carnage. He turned all the women on their sides in hopes that the death rate would drop, but with no results. He thought maybe the bell that the priest rang late in the evenings scared the women, so he made the priest enter silently, yet without any drop in death rates.

As he contemplated his dilemma, he watched young medical students perform their routine tasks. Each day the students would perform autopsies on the dead mothers. Then they would rinse their hands in a bowl of bloody water, wipe them off on a common, shared towel, and immediately begin internal examinations of the still-living women.

Semmelweis ordered everyone in his ward to wash his or her hands thoroughly in a chlorine solution after every examination. In three months, the death rate fell from 18% to 1%.

That was certainly an amazing discovery for 1847, but God had told the Israelites about it nearly four millennia earlier!

Numbers 19:11-13 - Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days. He shall cleanse

himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean. But if he does not cleanse himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean. Whoever touches a dead person, the body of anyone who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not thrown on him, he shall be unclean. His uncleanness is still on him.

So, yes, Ephraim owed its health to God and to the Law of God - but Ephraim did not remember that. And neither did we - at least not in 1847! "They did not know that I healed them."

Lesson 37

Hosea 11:4

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

Once again we have a change of metaphor. Rather than being a wife or a child, Ephraim is now an ox whose yoke is loosened by God and who is then hand-fed by God.

Verse 4 opens with the phrase, “I led them with cords of kindness,” but that translation is really a paraphrase. The Hebrew literally reads, “I led them with cords of a human.” What does that mean?

One possibility is that the intent of the phrase is not the kindness of God but instead is the gentleness of God. Rather than leading this ox with an all-powerful rope made by God, God instead uses a much less powerful rope made by man.

Another possibility is that this human rope is none other than Moses.

Yes, God led Israel out of Egypt, but God used a particular human to do that. And rather than talk to the people directly, God talked to them through that human.

I think this possibility also suggests gentleness, but it does so in a much more specific way. God dealt gently with the people through his use of an intermediary, Moses.

That view also explains the next phrase, “with the bands of love,” or “ropes of love.” God was doing things this way because he loved them.

And God eased the burden of their yoke. He did not remove the yoke entirely so as to make them a wild ox, but rather God adjusted

their yoke so that it was easier for them to bear. The harshness of Pharaoh was replaced by the gentleness of God.

And finally, God fed this ox by hand, which, of course, also reminds us of the exodus and the manna that God provided for his people.

Hosea 11:5

5 They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

Earlier in Hosea, God said that he would return them to Egypt.

Hosea 8:13 - Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins; **they shall return to Egypt.**

But now God says that they shall **not** return to Egypt. How do we explain that? We have already answered that question.

When God said that they would return to Egypt, God was telling the people that once again they would find themselves under the power of a foreign government. Once again they would be in bondage, just as they had been in bondage when they were slaves in Egypt. In effect, God was telling the people that he was going to put them back where he found them - put them back in the same state they had been in before God rescued them.

The reference to Egypt back in Hosea 8:13 was not literal, but instead was figurative. How do we know that?

First, we know that because of the **first** half of Hosea 11:5. It cannot be true that the people would both literally return to Egypt and not literally return to Egypt. Something has to give!

Second, we know that the reference to Egypt in Hosea 8:13 is not literal because of the history recounted elsewhere in the Bible.

Although a few people may have fled to Egypt, the great majority of them went to Assyria rather than to Egypt. Israel was conquered by Assyria rather than by Egypt. Hosea has already told us what would happen: Assyria would invade while Egypt laughed.

And third, we know that the reference to Egypt in Hosea 8:13 is not literal because of the **second** half of Hosea 11:5. We are told here precisely where the people were going - not to Egypt, but rather to Assyria.

And why was this happening? Verse 5 tells us - again! "Because they have refused to return to me." That was the same reason we saw at the end of Chapter 9.

Hosea 9:17 - My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.

The first step in knowing God is to listen to God. The people here did not know God because they had not listened to God.

And, as a result, they were going to once again find themselves in bondage - this time in Assyria rather than in Egypt - but bondage is bondage no matter who holds the key to that jail cell.

Hosea 11:6

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

The raging sword in verse 6 was the sword of Assyria, and that raging sword would soon be used against the cities of Israel.

The Handout for Lesson 37 shows what one book has to say about Assyria's army and Assyrian tactics. Here is how another recent book describes the Assyrian strategy.

Three primary strategies of warfare existed for the Assyrians: pitched battles, siege warfare, and psychological warfare. A pitched battle occurred between two armies in open country. These typically were avoided if possible; they did not last long, and casualties were often high for both sides. ... Siege warfare also included tactics designed to break through the city walls: ramps, battering rams, digging of tunnels, flaming arrows, or ladders to scale the walls.

To avoid both pitched battles and siege warfare, Assyrians frequently employed tactics of psychological warfare. This involved instilling an “awesome fear” in their opponents — a calculated intimidation meant to convince opponents that the cost of war with Assyria was too great to bear. For example, the army might first surround the city walls and simply shout over to the inhabitants, trying to persuade them to surrender. [This is what happened when Assyria invaded Judah.]

If this method was unsuccessful, the army would target a weaker, nearby city and destroy it instead. The inhabitants would be punished as examples. This often involved torture, rape, bodily mutilation, eye gouging, skinning alive, etc. Towns would be burned, orchards cut down, fields would be salted so they could no longer be used, and so on. Skins, heads, body parts, and mutilated bodies — living or dead — could be gathered and displayed to further convince stubborn inhabitants that submission was the most sensible option. This was an effective way of instilling fear and establishing respect throughout the empire, and the Assyrian reputation was in itself an effective means of control.

That is the raging sword in verse 6.

The second phrase in verse 6 is “consume the bars of their gates,” and there is a translation issue with that phrase.

The Hebrew word translated “bars” in verse 6 has five possible meanings: pole, priest, boast, solitude, and linen. Apparently, because a bar in a gate looks like a pole, most translations agree with the ESV - “bars of their gates.”

But I think either “priest” or “boast” may be correct instead. The sword would consume all of the false priests of Baal, and the sword would put an end to all of their boasting.

We can't say for sure which is correct, and perhaps that particular word was chosen to convey all of those possibilities, each of which certainly came true when the Assyrians arrived.

Finally, verse 6 says that the Assyrians would “devour them because of their own counsels.”

First, the focus on their “counsels” in this phrase may suggest that “boasts” (rather than “bars” or “priests”) was the intended meaning of the prior phrase.

But second, we already know what these counsels were. King Hoshea switched his allegiance to Egypt at the last minute, which caused Assyria to invade. And, no doubt, Hoshea listened to many so-called wise counsellors before making that tremendously dumb decision! Ephraim was devoured because of those counsels!

Hosea 11:7

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

“My people **are bent** on turning away from me.”

That translation suggests that the people are determined to turn away from God, and perhaps that is the correct meaning - but the Hebrew word translated “bent” by the ESV literally means “hang.” And that is how the same word is used elsewhere in the Bible the few times it is used.

Deuteronomy 28:66 - Your life shall **hang** in doubt before you.

2 Samuel 21:12 - David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan ... where the Philistines had **hanged** them...

In neither case does the verb mean “bent upon” or “determined to” as verse 7 is translated here by the ESV. Instead, in each of those two other verses, the verb means “hang.”

And that verse from Deuteronomy 28 is particularly important because we know that Hosea has been referring us back to that chapter in Deuteronomy all throughout the book.

So, if the verb means here in verse 7 what it means elsewhere in the Bible, what then is verse 7 saying?

“My people are **hanging on** turning away from me.” That is, “my people are **depending on** turning away from me.”

In short, the people had chosen Baal over God - and they thought they had made the right choice! In fact, they were depending on having made the right choice. They were hanging all their hopes on having made the right choice.

But by now I suspect they were having some serious doubts about that choice. And what was it we read just a moment ago from Deuteronomy 28?

Deuteronomy 28:66 - Your life shall **hang in doubt** before you.

I think verse 7 is once again pointing us back to Deuteronomy 28.

The people had been **hanging** everything on their choice of Baal over God - but now they were **hanging** in doubt instead!

And that doubt might very well cause them to switch back to God - as if loyalty is something that can be switched on and off.

If the people had been loyal to God they would never have switched to Baal in the first place. That they are now trying to switch back to God is not a sign of loyalty but instead is a sign of desperation.

And that is how God sees it: “he shall not raise them up at all.”

Yes, they call out to God in their doubt about Baal, but God will not save them from what is to come.

God told them in Hosea 10:12 what they needed to do if they wanted to return to him, and they are not doing those things here. Instead, when they realize Baal has failed them, they are suddenly just trying to switch horses once again.

That is not repentance. That is not sowing righteousness. That is not reaping steadfast love. That is not breaking up fallow ground. That is not seeking the Lord. The people are not doing what God told them to do in Hosea 10:12.

Hosea 11:8

8 How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

We have asked it before, but let's ask it again: Was God happy about what was happening to Israel? Was God saying with grim satisfaction, "I told you so!"? Was God pleased that Israel was finally getting what it deserved?

I think verse 8 answers those questions with a resounding no. Here is how one commentary describes this verse:

Abruptly, God 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, God is here at a loss as he tries to resolve his compassion for Israel and the punishment demanded by their sin. One may of course regard this as metaphor, as language that somehow puts divine love into terms that a human can understand, even though God himself does not really experience self-doubt and anxiety over issues of justice and mercy. ... While accepting the fact that God transcends our metaphors ..., texts such as this should be allowed to speak to us in the power of their raw emotion. It is precisely in texts such as this that the love of God becomes a vivid reality and not a barren abstraction.

And that is the picture we see here in verse 8: raw emotion.

This is God speaking! *How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My heart recoils within me.*

Again, in a single verse, we see both the great beauty of this book and the great sadness of this book. We see both the great depth of God's love and the great depravity of those who had rejected God.

And God is giving them up. God is handing them over.

Is God happy about that? Not at all! "My heart recoils within me," he says.

How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?

Who or what was Admah? Who or what was Zeboiim?

Zeboiim and Admah, together with Bela, were the **other** cities of the plain along with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 14.

Genesis 14:2 - These kings made war with Bera king of **Sodom**, Birsha king of **Gomorrah**, Shinab king of **Admah**, Shemeber king of **Zeboiim**, and the king of **Bela** (that is, Zoar).

And Admah and Zeboiim were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 19:24-25 - Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, **and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities**, and what grew on the ground.

Deuteronomy 29:23 - The whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, **Admah, and Zeboiim**, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath.

Jeremiah 49:18 - As when Sodom and Gomorrah **and their neighboring cities** were overthrown, says the LORD, no man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her.

So that answers our first question - when God asks, "How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?," God is asking, "How can I do to you what I did to Sodom and Gomorrah?"

But we now have a second question - why didn't God say that? Why didn't God refer to the two famous cities everyone knows about? Why instead do we see Admah and Zeboiim?

We know that Sodom and Gomorrah are frequently mentioned by other prophets.

Isaiah 1:9 - If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Amos 4:11 - I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD.

Why don't we see that here in Hosea? Why do we instead see Admah and Zeboiim?

Here is what one commentator says:

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Hosea is at times deliberately obscure, elusive, and demanding of his reader. ... 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.

And by "Hosea," I think he must mean the book rather than the person. Why? Because God is the one speaking here in verse 8. If someone is being deliberately obscure here, it is God.

And, yes, God is being obscure here, but I do not think God is being obscure just for the sake of being obscure. Instead, I think God chose these two obscure cities to give the people a **reminder**.

Admah and Zeboiim are mentioned in three places in the Bible. Hosea is one place, and Genesis is another place. And where is the third place? We saw that verse just a moment ago - Deuteronomy 29:23.

And where is Deuteronomy 29? Right after Deuteronomy 28!

God is once again pointing the people back to that chapter full of the curses they had been told to expect if they ever did the things that they had now done. Admah and Zeboiim take us straight back to Deuteronomy 28 and 29.

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

We have already talked about the first half of that sentence. Far from being happy about what was happening, God says that it is causing his heart to recoil within him.

And God also says here that his compassion grows warm and tender. I think we know what that means - but what does it mean in this context? How could God still send the Assyrians to destroy Ephraim if his compassion had grown warm and tender?

I think we will find the answer to that question in the next verse.

Hosea 11:9

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

This book never gets any easier! We have a lot of very hard questions about verse 9!

- Why in verse 9 does God say that he will **not** execute his anger and will **not** destroy Ephraim even though God has seemingly been saying all throughout the book that he will in fact do both of those things and even though the Bible elsewhere seemingly confirms that God, in fact, did both of those things when the Assyrians invaded?
- And why in verse 9 does God say that he will not **again** destroy Ephraim? When had God destroyed Ephraim the first time?
- And we still have our question left over from verse 8 - how was the Assyrian invasion of Ephraim an example of God's warm and tender compassion?

We are going to look at those questions in some detail, but here is the short answer to all three questions: **things could have been worse!**

We cannot understand verse 9 apart from its context in verse 8, which is Sodom and Gomorrah (and the neighboring cities). God was **not** going to do to Ephraim what he had done to those other cities. And what had God done to those other cities?

Genesis 19:24 - Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

That was not going to happen to Ephraim, and that was an example of God's warm and tender compassion. Why?

Because by not doing to Ephraim what he had done to Sodom and Gomorrah, some might have said that God owed those other cities an apology! In fact, I think that same point is made elsewhere in other contexts.

Ezekiel 16:48 - As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.

Matthew 11:24 - But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

If God had rained fire and brimstone down on Ephraim, no one could have called it unjust. Why not? Because Ephraim was worse than Sodom and Gomorrah had ever been! Ephraim had started higher and had fallen further.

But God did not do to Ephraim what Ephraim deserved. And I think that is the point of verse 9.

The "burning anger" not executed in verse 9 is the burning anger that turned the cities of the plain into just a plain in Genesis 19.

That leaves only one remaining question: why in verse 9 does God say that he will not **again** destroy Ephraim? When had God destroyed Ephraim the first time?

In these verses, Ephraim is described as a second Sodom. What that means is that Sodom was the first Ephraim. And so, I think the word "again" in verse 9 is referring us back to the destruction of Sodom, the first Ephraim.

"And I will not come in wrath."

There is a translation issue here, and I prefer the KJV ("I will not enter into the city") over the ESV ("I will not come in wrath").

Why? Because entering the city has a particularly important meaning when it comes to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18:22-26 - So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” And the LORD said, “**If I find at Sodom** fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

And we recall that Abraham eventually got the number down to 10 - but even that was not enough to spare those cities.

But notice that phrase in verse 26 - “If I find at Sodom...” That is God speaking. And the picture that phrase shows us is God entering the city of Sodom and looking for righteous people.

And what does God then say here in verse 9? “I will **not** enter into the city.”

And why not? Because God had already decided **not** to do to Ephraim what he had done to Sodom. There was no need for God to enter the city and count the righteous. The decision had already been made.

“For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst.”

I think we know what that means, but why does God say it here?

To answer that question, I think we need to once again turn back to Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 23:14 - Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

Earlier we said that God did not enter the city because there was no need for him to do so. But here I think we see another reason

why God did not enter the city - because had God done so, he would surely have destroyed it!

Verse 7 shows the people crying out to God after Baal had failed them. I think here in verse 9 what we see is that the people should have been very thankful that God did not show up to see what they had been doing!

These verses are speaking of God in terms of a man - someone who walks in their camp and someone who visits or does not visit a city. But those *anthropomorphic* descriptions of God are simply describing the nature of God to us in terms that we can understand.

We know that God is not a man - as this verse reminds us. We know that God is omnipresent and omniscient. God was in that city, and God knew everything that was going on there. And we also know that God knew how many righteous people were in Sodom the entire time he was bargaining with Abraham.

But, with all of that said, I think we see some very interesting foreshadowing in verse 9. Why?

Because the great blessings that we see in this book of Hosea about Israel's future are possible only because God did, in fact, become a man and did, in fact, literally enter a city.

Philippians 2:5-7 - Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

God **the Father** says here, "I am God and **not a man**, the Holy One in your midst."

But God **the Son** could later say, "I am God **and a man**, the Holy One in your midst."

Hosea 11:10-11

10 They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; 11 they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,

and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.

In verse 8, we saw the compassion of God.

In verse 9, we saw one way that God showed that compassion to Ephraim - he did not destroy them as he had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah even though Ephraim deserved a worse punishment than God had inflicted upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now, in verses 10-11, we see another way that God showed his compassion to Ephraim - he was planning to bless Ephraim at a future time.

And, yes, these verses are jumping quickly from one topic to another - but that should not surprise us now that we have seen 11 chapters of Hosea! While Isaiah might take a chapter or two for each of these topics, Hosea takes only a verse or two!

But how do we know that verses 10-11 have shifted to the future? How do we know that these verses are describing a future blessing? Because of several reasons.

First, we have the verb tense: “They **shall go** after the LORD. ... I **will return** them to their home.”

Second, we have the promise of a **return**.

We know that the people listening to Hosea did not return from exile. The remaining northern tribes were scattered and never returned. By the time Jesus came, those tribes had become Samaritans and were treated as Gentiles.

Third, we have **repentance**. “They shall **go after the LORD**; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall **come trembling** from the west.”

We know that, at this time, Ephraim did not repent. And how do we know that? We know that because even at this late date God promised in Hosea 10:12 to restore them if they repented - and we know they were not restored. We know that Assyria invaded and carried them all off.

Lesson 38

A Review of Some Terminology

The names Israel, Judah, and Ephraim mean different things at different points in history.

- Is Ephraim pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian? It depends on when we ask.
- Is Ephraim the same as Israel or different? It depends on when we ask.
- Are there two kingdoms or three kingdoms? It depends on when we ask.
- Was Pekah the king of Israel or the king of Ephraim? It depends on when we ask.

First, they are the names of people. (See the numbered items on the Handout for Lesson 38.)

The patriarch Jacob was also named Israel, and he had twelve sons, which included Judah and Josph. Josph had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Second, Israel became the name of the entire nation, which was divided up into twelve tribes.

Because Levi did not get a tribal allotment, Joseph's allotment was divided between his two sons so that the number of tribal regions would remain 12. That means there was a tribe named Judah, and another tribe (actually a half-tribe) named Ephraim. This was the situation during the days of the judges and the days of the unified kingdom under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon.

Third, when the kingdom was divided after Solomon, the northern kingdom retained the national name Israel (likely because it also retained most of the tribes).

The southern kingdom was named Judah because Judah was the largest tribe in the south. Benjamin was also a southern tribe at this time, but the southern tribe of Simeon had by this time already been absorbed into Judah. When the book of Hosea opened this situation was still in place.

Fourth, there was civil war in the north when Menahem became the pro-Assyrian king of Ephraim based on the west side of the Jordan River and Pekah became the anti-Assyrian king of Israel based on the east side of the Jordan River. During this twelve year period, there were three kingdoms: Judah, Ephraim, and Israel. Part of Hosea takes place in this time period.

Fifth, after Menahem's son, Pekahiah, was killed by his rival, King Pekah, the civil war ended and we once again had only two kingdoms: Judah and Israel.

But two things then happened: (1) Pekah moved his throne to Samaria in Ephraim (where Pekahiah had ruled), and (2) Assyria soon took most of the land that was east of the Jordan (where Pekah had ruled).

And so, the nation of Israel could rightly be called Ephraim because the tribe of Ephraim was just about all that was left and the government was located in Ephraim. This was the situation when Samaria was besieged by Assyria and when Israel was finally defeated. The end of Hosea is focused on this time period.

So, to what do Israel, Judah, and Ephraim refer? It depends on when we ask!

Hosea 11:10-11 (Continued)

10 They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; 11 they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.

Last week we saw that verses 10-11 have shifted forward in time and are describing **future** blessings that were in store later for Ephraim or Israel.

Our first question this week is this: What future blessing are these verses describing?

We know the answer to that question. We have already seen it in this book of Hosea. The future blessing promised for Israel was the same future blessing promised for all the world - Jesus!

When did Israel repent? When was Israel saved? When did Israel go after the Lord? When did God roar like a lion? When did Israel return?

Again, we know the answer to those questions - those things happened when Jesus came in the first century to bless the entire world.

Jeremiah tells us the same thing:

Jeremiah 23:5-6 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.** And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Jeremiah 30:3 - For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah,** says the LORD, and **I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.**

Those things occurred when Christ established his new covenant, which we read all about in the next chapter of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

But did God roar like a lion at that time? Yes, he did.

Revelation 5:5 - And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; **behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered**, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

Verses 10-11 are a wonderful prophecy about Christ and about the church of Christ. And, in particular, these verses are a wonderful prophecy about the blessings that lay in store for Israel in the Lord's kingdom.

Yes, God still had a special plan for Israel - but it was the same special plan that God had for everyone. And that special plan was the gospel of Christ through which God offered entry for all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, into the kingdom of Christ.

And those who believe that God has some special plan today for the Jews that is different from God's plan for everyone else - they should pause and think about what they are saying! If God needs a plan that is different from the gospel of Christ - then what does that say about the gospel? Is the new plan better than the gospel? How could it possibly be better? Or is the new plan inferior to the gospel? Then why do we need it? The gospel of Christ is the only plan anyone needs!

In these verses we see the scattered northern tribes enjoying that great blessing. They turn to God, and when God roars they all come trembling from wherever they had been scattered - from the west, from Assyria, and from Egypt. And God returns them to their homes.

What we see here is a **new exodus**. God is once again leading his people out of bondage. And when did that new exodus happen?

Galatians 5:1 - For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Despite all that they had done, God was still planning to bless Israel - but those blessings were for the future generations of Hosea's listeners, and those blessings would not be enjoyed until the time came when God blessed the entire world through the Messiah.

And we see an example of the fulfillment of verses 10-11 when we turn to John 4 and read about the Samaritan woman at the well, who was a descendant of Hosea's listeners.

John 4:25 - The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Yes, Hosea may be the saddest book in the Bible. But even the saddest book in the Bible has a happy ending - and we see that happy ending prophesied here in verses 10-11 and fulfilled in John 4.

Before we leave these verses, let's look more closely at the promise we see at the end of verse 11: "I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD."

Is this a **literal** return or a **figurative** return?

The explanation we just considered interprets that phrase **figuratively**. That is, the people would not literally return to the land of Israel, but rather their descendants would return to spiritual Israel when they obeyed the gospel and were added to the Lord's church.

Romans 11:24 - For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be **grafted back into their own olive tree**.

Galatians 6:15-16 - For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon **the Israel of God**.

Under that view, God never promised to literally return the scattered Israelites of the northern tribes back to their homeland. Yes, many Jews returned to Palestine in 1947, but that return was not the result of any promise made by God.

Yes, we do see promises of future blessings for Israel in Hosea and elsewhere in the Bible, but those promises were fulfilled when Jesus came and brought the great world-wide blessing that had been promised to Abraham long before.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 - Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when **I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel** and the house of Judah. **In those days and at that time** I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **In those days** Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Acts 3:24-26 - **And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, '**And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.**' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

But how do we respond to those who argue for a literal fulfillment of this promised return?

Some argue that this promised return happened in 1947, while others argue that it will happen at or near the end of the world. They say that the return will be a literal return to physical land. How should we respond to that?

Very often, those who argue for a literal return will tell you proudly that they are simply taking the Bible to mean what it says. You will sometimes hear them use the phrase "rigid literalism." They will brag that they take everything in the Bible literally, and they will criticize us for doing otherwise. How should we respond?

I think a very good way to respond is to first point them to what the Bible has to say about rigid literalism. Yes, most things in the Bible should be understood literally, but not everything - and the Bible is very clear on that point. Rigid literalism is the wrong way to approach the Bible. The Bible itself tells us that.

But where does the Bible tell us that? To answer that question, we need to turn to a book in the New Testament written by the Apostle John - but that book is not the book of Revelation (the most figurative book in the entire Bible), but instead is one of his other books - the gospel of John.

There is a frequently recurring theme in the book of John, and that theme is this: we should **not** interpret the Bible with a rigid literalism.

Over and over again in the book of John we see people who are interpreting the words of God with a rigid literalism, but who are told that their rigidly literal view is completely wrong!

John 2:19-21 - Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

John 3:3-4 - Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

John 4:13-15 - Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

John 4:32-34 - But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

John 6:51-52 - "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of

the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

John 7:33-35 - Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?”

John 8:21-22 - So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” So the Jews said, “Will he kill himself, since he says, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?”

John 11:11-13 - After saying these things, he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

John 13:8-9 - Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

In each of those nine examples, someone interprets the word of Christ with what can only be called “rigid literalism,” and in each case that interpretation is wrong.

And I find it very interesting that those inspired examples are from the pen of the same apostle who gave us the most figurative book in the Bible - the book of Revelation. Do you think that perhaps John was trying to tell us something about that other book?

Yes, most of the Bible should be understood literally - but not all of the Bible. And how do we know that? We know that for many reasons, but one reason comes from the nine examples we just looked at from the book of John. And those nine examples are a good

starting point if you ever find yourself discussing the Bible with a rigid literalist.

Hosea 11:12

12 Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.

Yes, a happy ending was promised, but no, that happy ending was not promised to the people of Hosea's own day. Instead, it would be a happy ending for their descendants when they heard and obeyed the gospel.

But here in verse 12 Hosea takes us back once again to the people of his own day. "Ephraim **has** (now back to past tense) surrounded **me** with lies." To whom does the pronoun "me" refer?

It could be Hosea himself, in which case verse 12 would be describing all of the false shrines and false worship that Hosea no doubt saw all around him.

Or it could be God, in which case verse 12 would again be describing all of the false shrines and false worship that the people had built in the land given to them by God.

But how had those things "surrounded" God? I think the example of Bethel that we have already seen several times answers that question - Bethel means House of God, but we know that Bethel had instead been turned into a House of Wickedness. They had surrounded God with lies in his own house!

Verse 12 also uses the phrase "house of Israel," and we have talked before about that phrase. Either it refers to the land of Israel or perhaps it refers to the leadership of Israel. Either way, the point is the same - all of Israel was filled with lies and deceit.

And so, while God had blessings in store for Israel, those blessings would not come for this rebellious generation. Instead, those blessings would come to future generations who would hear and obey the gospel.

But what about the future people who heard the gospel but rejected it? They would also be rejected just like their rebellious ancestors had been rejected.

Matthew 21:37-41 - Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.

That’s the first half of verse 12 - the easy half. Let’s now look at the second half of verse 12 - the difficult half!

“But Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.”

And our first question is this: Is verse 12 **complimenting** Judah or **condemning** Judah?

The answer is easy if we look only at the ESV translation, but the ESV is not the only translation. While verse 12 is certainly a compliment of Judah in the ESV, in other translations it is certainly not.

- (NIV) And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.
- (NEB) And Judah is still restive under God, still loyal to the idols he counts holy.
- (NCV) And Judah turns against God, the faithful Holy One.

So which is correct? Is Judah being complimented or criticized?

Back when I taught engineering, I would always tell my students that, after answering an exam question, they should always pause and ask themselves whether their answer makes sense before moving on to the next question. Let’s ask that same question here.

Based on the context, what would we expect to see about Judah in verse 12? A compliment or a criticism? Well, here is what we see just two verses later:

Hosea 12:2 - The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds.

If Judah is walking with God and still faithful to the Holy One, then why is Judah being indicted by God only two verses later? I think the answer is that the ESV translation of verse 12 is wrong. I think the other translations are correct in at least one respect - I agree with them that verse 12 is a criticism of Judah.

But what then is going on here at the end of verse 12? Why is it so difficult to translate? And which translation is correct?

The difficulty comes from the Hebrew words used in verse 12 that are thought by many (including the ESV) to refer to God - "El" translated "God" and "Qados" translated "Holy One" in the ESV.

Those words are sometimes used in the Bible **not** in reference to God. In fact, absent context, those two words are ambiguous.

Exodus 34:14 - For you shall worship no other **god** [El], for the LORD [Yahweh], whose name is Jealous, is a jealous **God** [El].

Zechariah 14:5 - Then the LORD [Yahweh] my God [Elohim] will come, and all the **holy ones** [Qados] with him.

Psalms 89:7 - a **God** [El] greatly to be feared in the council of the **holy ones** [Qados]...

As we see in those examples, the word El can refer either to God or to false gods, and the word Qados, when not used of God, is often translated as the **plural** phrase, "Holy Ones."

So what then does verse 12 tell us? That Judah still walks with God and is faithful to God? Or that Judah still walks with Baal and is faithful to this group of holy ones, which they likely think includes Baal?

Let's put ourselves in the place of someone in Judah who was perhaps hearing that statement from a priest - "Judah still walks with El" and is faithful to the "Qados." How would that person understand that phrase?

If that person was a follower of God, and if the priest offered no further explanation about what he meant, then I suspect that person might hear the phrase this way: "Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One."

But if that person was a follower of Baal, and if the priest offered no further explanation about what he meant, then I suspect that person might hear the phrase this way: "Judah still walks with Baal and is faithful to all the gods."

In short, that phrase can be understood in two ways - and, absent further explanation, that phrase would most likely be understood by a listener to mean what that person naturally expected it to mean.

So what if there were two people listening to that priest at the same time - one person who was a follower of God and one person who was a follower of Baal? How would those two people interpret that phrase? Would one of them be upset by it?

The answer is very possibly no. They both would be fine with what the priest said. The Baal follower would hear the praise of Baal, and the follower of God would hear the praise of God - even though they are both hearing the exact same words from the exact same person at the exact same time!

So what can we say about the words used here in verse 12? I think we can say that they are ambiguous - they could refer to God or they could refer to false gods. **And I think that ambiguity is deliberate!**

Remember, Baalism was at an earlier stage in Judah than it was in Israel. The false priests in Judah likely sometimes found themselves in front of a crowd that included both worshippers of God and worshippers of Baal. And those priests didn't want to make either group mad. And so what was the solution? Deliberate ambiguity!

Just don't say anything clearly. Instead, use vague language that can mean one thing to one group and another thing to another group. And don't let either group ever pin you down on what you believe!

“Well, I’m sure glad that doesn’t happen anymore!” If only that were true!

Is baptism in water necessary for salvation?

- “There were no unbaptized Christians in the first century.”
- “Baptism is an important part of the Christian experience.”
- “Everyone who follows Christ should be baptized.”
- “Baptism is how we celebrate Jesus.”
- “Holy Spirit baptism is how we get the Holy Spirit!”
- “Baptism is an important part of our religious heritage.”
- “We have always taught the importance baptism as part of the Stone-Campbell movement.”
- “Baptized is required to join our church.”
- “Baptism has always been part of our tradition.”
- “Baptism is our truth.”

As a lawyer, I have the same reaction to each of those answers: **Objection! Non-responsive!**

Is baptism in water necessary for salvation?

That is a yes or no question, and any teacher responding with anything other than a yes or no is, I suggest, being deliberately and dishonestly evasive.

And such a person is very likely tap-dancing around that question so that he can appeal to two different crowds, with half the crowd hearing “no, baptism is not necessary” and the other half hearing “yes, baptism is necessary.”

Deliberate dishonest ambiguity has always been the favorite tool of false teachers. They have to keep everyone happy, at least up to the point when they drop the inevitable bomb! I suspect that many of us have seen it done!

Those who purport to teach God’s word should always endeavor to do so with great clarity and should never do so with dishonesty.

2 Corinthians 2:17 - For we are not, like so many, **peddlers of God's word**, but as men of **sincerity**, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:2 - But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. **We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word**, but by the **open statement of the truth** we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

So, back to the end of verse 12, is that phrase a compliment of Judah or a criticism of Judah? And the answer is ... Yes! It depends on what you want to hear!

I think the text is sarcastically quoting the priests in Judah who were making vague statements about God ["El"] in an attempt to appeal both to those who came to worship God and to those who came instead to worship Baal.

In short, Judah was following the evil example of Israel, but Judah was not as far along in their apostasy as Israel was. And so the priests could not yet just boldly write "Temple of Baal" on the front door. Instead, they had to be really clever and really careful about what they said until the time was right.

So, no, verse 12 is not a compliment of Judah - and that certainly should not surprise us.

And one final question about verse 12: How does the text make this point about the ambiguous priests of Judah? It does so by being ambiguous right back at them! And I suspect those priests had some puzzled looks on their faces when they heard their own vague statement quoted right back at them by Hosea! They thought they were all being so clever!

Lesson 39

Hosea 12:1

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

Chapter 12 starts off with a translation issue. The Hebrew word translated “feed” in the ESV means “feed” when used for an animal, but otherwise means “shepherd.” We see both uses in the Psalms.

Psalm 23:1 - The LORD is my **shepherd**; I shall not want.

Psalm 80:13 - The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field **feed** on it.

So what is the metaphor in verse 1? Is Israel like the sheep or is Israel like the shepherd?

I think the second verb in verse 1 (“pursues”) answers that question. I think what we see in verse 1 is a shepherd that is trying to control the wind the same way he controls his sheep and that is pursuing the east wind the same way he pursues his straying sheep.

I like the RSV translation:

Ephraim **herds** the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long.

And so what then is the point of this metaphor?

The point is that Ephraim is trying to control something that is uncontrollable. Ephraim is trying to manage something that is completely out of its control and out of its ability to manage in any way. In short, Ephraim is playing with fire.

And how are the people doing that? The end of verse 1 answers that question: “they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.”

Ephraim was operating way out of its league. They were trying to make agreements with Assyria while secretly courting Egypt. And we know the result of that folly - when Assyria heard about it, they invaded and carried the people off into permanent exile while Egypt watched and laughed.

And finally what about that phrase in the middle? “they multiply falsehood and violence.”

I think that phrase shows what happened when Ephraim tried to manage things on its own apart from God - what happened when Ephraim found itself holding a tiger by the tail. That precarious situation led to falsehood and violence.

The falsehood is most likely the duplicity of Ephraim as it tried to keep both Egypt and Assyria happy while it courted the one and lied to the other.

And the violence, of course, is what resulted from the lies that Ephraim told to Assyria. The Assyrian army showed up with great violence to put an end to Ephraim’s lies. And this was all a result of Ephraim trying to manage things all on its own - by Ephraim trying to shepherd the wind.

And I think there is a lesson here for us. Philippians 4:13 does not say, “I can do all things.” Instead, that verse says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” With God, we are powerful. Without God, we are powerless.

Hosea 12:2

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

Earlier we wondered whether Hosea 11:12 was a compliment or a criticism of Judah, and Hosea 12:2 (being just two verses later) caused us to lean toward that earlier verse being a criticism of Judah, which I think it is.

Here, there is no doubt. This verse is certainly a criticism of Judah. “The LORD has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds.”

The word translated “indictment” in the ESV just means a complaint or an accusation. There is no need for us to picture a formal courtroom scene as some commentaries suggest.

The big question for us here is not what Judah had done to deserve this accusation - we already know that Judah was following the bad example of her sister, Israel.

Instead, the big question for us here is why we see a switch from Judah to Jacob. The accusation is against **Judah**, but the punishment and the repayment are directed against **Jacob**. Why the switch?

So far, most of Hosea has been directed against Israel in the north, with only a few passing references to Judah in the south.

Here, by referring to Jacob, I think that Hosea is looking at both Judah and Israel at the same time. By talking about Jacob, Hosea is taking us back in time prior to the tribal divisions and prior to the divided kingdom.

Like a psychologist, I think Hosea is wondering here what he might learn about the people of his own day by examining their parents.

And I think what Hosea finds is that their famous namesake, Jacob, had both good traits and bad traits. But the people of Hosea’s day had inherited only Jacob’s bad traits.

And so we read that “Jacob” would be punished according to his ways and repaid according to his deeds.

In that statement, I think Hosea is using the name “Jacob” primarily to refer to the descendants of Jacob (both Judah and Israel) - but I think there is also in that statement a reference to Jacob the man, and to his ways, and to his deeds. Why? Because in the next few verses Hosea is going to describe the ways and the deeds of Jacob the person.

And I think the reason for this is that Hosea wants us to see the **bad** traits of Jacob that are evident now in the descendants of Jacob. And I think Hosea also wants us to see the **good** traits of Jacob that are **not** evident in the descendants of Jacob.

Why are the people so different from Jacob? Because Jacob knew God, while Hosea's listeners did not.

Yes, Jacob had his faults, but Jacob had an encounter with God and was forever changed by that encounter.

And to make that point, Hosea, in the next two verses, gives us an extremely abbreviated summary of Jacob's life.

Hosea 12:3-4

3 In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. 4 He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us--

These verses seem straightforward, but there is a surprising amount of controversy about them in the commentaries. Why?

- First, there is some disagreement about which events in Jacob's life are being described here.
- Second, there is some concern about the possibly non-chronological order of the events in these verses.
- Third, there is some confusion about the subjects of some of the pronouns in these verses.
- And fourth, there is some discussion about the origin of some of the words in these verses.

So, to unravel these two verses, let's look at three questions.

- First, what does the Bible (outside of Hosea) tell us about Jacob?
- Second, what does Hosea tell us about Jacob?
- Third, why did Hosea tell us these things about Jacob?

Question #1: What does the Bible (outside of Hosea) tell us about Jacob?

We all know that Jacob was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, and we all know that Jacob had a twin brother, Esau. And we also all know that there was an almost constant struggle between Jacob and Esau, beginning even before they were born.

Genesis 25:21-26 - And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. **The children struggled together within her**, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.” When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. **Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel**, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

Later, we know that Jacob managed to obtain Esau's birthright by taking advantage of his brother's hunger.

Genesis 25:29-34 - Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. And Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!” (Therefore his name was called Edom.) **Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright now.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”** Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. **Thus Esau despised his birthright.**

And we know that Jacob also managed to obtain Esau's blessing through lying and trickery directed at his father, Isaac.

Genesis 27:18-24 - So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the LORD your God granted me success." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." **So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him.** He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am."

And we know that Jacob then fled from Esau and had an encounter with God at Bethel as he was on his way to live with Laban in the east, where he would marry Leah and Rachel.

Genesis 28:10-19 - Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. **And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!** And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. **The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.** Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did

not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. **He called the name of that place Bethel**, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

And we know that Jacob later had a very unusual encounter with an angel of God at Peniel while on his way back from Laban to be reunited with Esau.

Genesis 32:24-30 - And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

And we know that Jacob met with Esau his brother and that the two were reconciled.

Genesis 33:1-4 - And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. **He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.** But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, **and they wept.**

And, finally, we know that God once again met with Jacob at Bethel to restate and reaffirm the promises that he had earlier made to Jacob there.

Genesis 35:9-15 - God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A **nation** and a company of nations shall come from you, and **kings** shall come from your own body. **The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.**” Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

There are certainly other important events about Jacob that we could review, but I think those are the only events we need for our purposes here.

Our next task is to match what we just reviewed with what we find here in Hosea 12:3-4. And let’s start by re-reading those two verses.

In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us.

Question #2: What did Hosea say in verses 3-4 about Jacob?

“In the womb he took his brother by the heel.”

This event is easy to identify in the life of Jacob. As we read earlier, the struggle between Jacob and Esau began prior to their birth when Jacob grabbed Esau’s heel in a seeming attempt to prevent Esau from being born first.

But we need to remember something important about Hosea - Hosea usually does not teach us by explaining things, but instead Hosea usually teaches us by reminding us about things.

If Hosea wants to tell us three things, sometimes he will do so by reminding us about the first thing, with the expectation that we will then remember (or perhaps go look up) the other two things.

I think that may be what is happening here, and I think the point Hosea wants us to remember is that Jacob struggled with Esau throughout most of his life, starting even before he was born!

Yes, Hosea could have said that. Yes, Hosea could have listed all the times that Jacob and Esau struggled, including the time when Esau lost his birthright, the time when Esau lost his blessing, and the times when Jacob feared that Esau would kill him.

But Hosea does not do that. Instead, Hosea just mentions the first time they struggled, and he expects us to then remember all of the other times they struggled. If we have come to Hosea to be spoon-fed, then we can come to the wrong place!

And I think Esau would have agreed with us here because Esau also saw that first struggle in the womb as an early indicator of the later struggles that occurred between the two.

Genesis 27:36 - Esau said, “**Is he not rightly named Jacob?** For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.

“Is he not rightly named Jacob?” Why did Esau ask that? Because the Hebrew verb translated “grasping his heel” is the root word of the name “Jacob” and is also similar to the word “deceived.”

I think that, like Esau clearly did, Hosea wants us to also see the entire life of Jacob in that short description of his birth.

“And in his manhood he strove with God.”

At this point, we might have expected Hosea to say, “and in his manhood he strove with **Esau**.” That is, Jacob struggled with Esau before his birth, and then Jacob continued to struggle with Esau in his manhood.

But that is not what Hosea tells us. Instead, Hosea tells us that Jacob struggled with Esau at his birth, and Jacob struggled with God in his manhood.

In fact, despite seeing the word “God” three times in the ESV translation of these two verses, this is the only phrase where the word “God” actually occurs. Elsewhere “God” is either referred to in the Hebrew with a pronoun or as an unstated subject.

But even though this struggle with God is seemingly a different struggle than the struggle with Esau, I think we are starting to see a theme in these two verses - the theme of **struggle** or **striving!** Let’s keep that theme in mind as we proceed.

What is this struggle or striving with God that occurred in Jacob’s manhood?

I think that without doubt this description is intended to at least include Jacob’s most famous struggle.

Genesis 32:28 - Then he [the angel] said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for **you have striven with God and with men**, and have prevailed.”

The Hebrew word translated “striven” in Genesis 32:28 is used in only one other place in the Bible - right here in Hosea 12:3.

Although there is much debate on this point, many commentaries say that Jacob’s new name “Israel” either means “he strives with God” or, more likely, “God strives.”

And I think that a better translation of Genesis 32:28 is that “you have striven with God, **and with men have you prevailed**” rather than “you have striven with God **and with men**, and have prevailed.”

And I think this verse in Hosea confirms that understanding. Here Hosea says that Jacob strove with God, but in the next phrase Hosea will say that Jacob strove with the angel **and prevailed**.

I’m sure we have many questions about that strange event, but most of those questions will have to wait for an equally detailed study of the book of Genesis! (Maybe someday!)

Here, I think all we need to do is focus on the word “struggled” or “striven.” So far, that is all we have seen Jacob doing. **He struggled**

with Esau, he **struggled** with God, and (as we will see with next phrase) he **struggled** with an angel.

And why do I say that this phrase **includes** that most famous struggle? Because I think once again Hosea intends for us to see something else in the short phrase that he uses here. I think Hosea wants us to see, not just Jacob's one-night struggle with God, but rather Jacob's life-long struggle with God.

Yes, Jacob is listed in Hebrews 11 on the great roll call of faith, but Hosea tells us that Jacob struggled with God. And I think there is a wonderful message for us in that - it is okay to struggle with God. Jacob is an example of that, and so is Job.

In fact, Job said some things to God that we might expect to have resulted in a swift lightning bolt from heaven!

Job 9:22-24 - He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. When disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked; he covers the faces of its judges — if it is not he, who then is it?

That is Job struggling with God. But we don't see any lightning bolts. Instead, what we see is that Job repents in Job 42:6 and that in the next verse God commends Job for speaking what is right.

So what is the message to us? It is this: we can struggle with God and still be faithful to God. Jacob is an example of that, and Job is an example of that.

“He strove with the angel and prevailed.”

Again, I think the focus here is the wrestling match at Peniel.

Not only did Jacob struggle with Esau in the womb and throughout his life, and not only did Jacob spiritually struggle with God, but Jacob physically struggled with an angel - and Jacob won!

And, again, I'm sure we have many questions about that strange event, but we need to keep focused on the key point that Hosea is making - Jacob's struggles.

So far, we have seen Jacob struggling before his birth and after his birth. And we have seen Jacob struggling with God and with man.

And we have seen that both of Jacob's names stem from his struggles, and we have seen Jacob struggle with an angel and win.

And so far, there is much in common between Jacob and the descendants of Jacob. Both were defined by their struggles.

The people listening to Hosea struggled with each other, struggled with the surrounding nations, struggled with the prophets of God, and struggled with God. They were certainly living up to their name-sake.

But did the people prevail? Well, yes, in a way they did. They seem to have gotten just what they wanted. They sought freedom from God, and God was cutting them loose.

Sometimes the very worst punishment we can receive from God is for God to let us have the very thing for which we are asking. I think Ephraim found that out the hard way!

And, yes, Ephraim was struggling with God, and yes, as we have seen, it is possible to struggle with God and be faithful to God. Jacob shows us that. But, of course, it is also possible to struggle with God and be faithless to God. Sadly, as we will see and have already seen, Ephraim shows us that.

“He wept and sought his favor.”

If struggling has been our theme so far in these two verses, I think we see a shift in that theme here. Instead of struggling, we see weeping and seeking.

But which weeping and which seeking? What event is being described here?

I think we have two choices. Either this weeping and this seeking occurred when Jacob wrestled with the angel, or this weeping and this seeking occurred later when Jacob was reconciled with Esau.

And I think the better option is the latter option - the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. We see no weeping at the wrestling match in Genesis 32, but we do see weeping at the reconciliation in Genesis 33.

Genesis 33:4 - But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they **wept**.

And I think we also see Jacob seeking Esau's favor at that time.

Genesis 33:3 - He himself went on before them, **bowing himself to the ground seven times**, until he came near to his brother.

But I don't think we see either the weeping or the seeking (at least not as clearly) during the events at Peniel when Jacob wrestled with the angel.

So what does that mean? It means that when Hosea says "**his** favor" in verse 4, Hosea is leaping over the angel and over God to go back to Esau ("his brother" in verse 3) for the antecedent of the pronoun "his."

Or is he? I think the answer is yes and no.

Yes, I think Esau is the immediate subject of the phrase "**his** favor," but I think (as usual) Hosea also has someone else in mind, and I think that someone else is God.

I think the picture Hosea is painting in these verses is that when Jacob was striving with Esau, Jacob was also striving with God - and when Jacob wept and sought Esau's favor, Jacob was also weeping and seeking God's favor.

And where did that take Jacob? It took him to Bethel.

"He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us."

We already know how important the city of Bethel is in the book of Hosea, and we know how important Bethel was in the life of Jacob, so we are not at all surprised to see Bethel when Hosea discusses Jacob. In fact, we would have been shocked if Bethel had not been mentioned here.

And let's review how we got to Bethel in these two verses. First, Jacob struggled with everyone around him, including God, and, second, Jacob wept and sought favor from those with whom he had struggled the most, Esau and God. And then, after struggling, after weeping, and after seeking favor - Jacob ends up at Bethel.

Now, we know that chronologically we have a difficulty here. Jacob met God at Bethel while he was fleeing from Esau, which was long before he wrestled with the angel and was reconciled with Esau.

But that difficulty evaporates when we remember that Jacob went back to Bethel much later so that God could restate and reaffirm the promises that Jacob had heard on his first visit with God at Bethel. I think that the meeting at Bethel in this phrase is the **second** meeting at Bethel.

Jacob met God at Bethel. Or perhaps we should instead say that God met Jacob at Bethel. The ESV says that “he met **God** at Bethel,” but the literal Hebrew says, “he found **him** in Bethel,” which leaves open the question of who found whom.

Either way, God and Jacob had a meeting at Bethel! And God told Jacob that the great promises he had given to Abraham now applied to him - not to his older brother, Esau, but to him, the younger brother.

Genesis 35:11-12 - A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.

Nations. Kings. Land. Jacob **and his descendants** were promised those three great blessings by God at Bethel, which means the house of God. But were those blessings being enjoyed by Jacob’s descendants? And if not, why not? That is our next issue.

Lesson 40

Last week we looked at Hosea 12:3-4, and we had three main questions about those two verses.

First, we looked at what the Bible (outside of Hosea) tells us about Jacob, and second, we looked at what Hosea tells us about Jacob in these two verses.

We are now ready to look at our third question.

Question #3: Why did Hosea say these things about Jacob?

It is clear that Hosea is reminding the people about these events from the life of Jacob to teach them a lesson - but what lesson?

And notice in verse 4 how skillfully Hosea brings his history lesson back to his own day and time. Look at the final word in verse 4: "There God spoke with **us**." Not just with Jacob, but with **us**.

God had also spoken with the people of Hosea's day when God spoke with Jacob at Bethel. And what did God say to them?

The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, **and I will give the land to your offspring after you.**

The people listening to Hosea were the offspring of Jacob. They had been promised the land by God at Bethel - but now God was throwing them off that land! What had happened?

I think that question is the reason we have these two verses. To answer that question is why Hosea has given us this history lesson.

And so what is the answer to that question? Why were the people being evicted from the land that God had promised to them at Bethel?

The answer is simple. It was because, **like** Jacob, the people were striving with everyone, including God, but **unlike** Jacob, the people were **not** weeping about what they had done and were **not** seeking God's favor.

Yes, they (along with Jacob) had received that promise at Bethel, the house of God, but now they had fallen so far that Hosea refers to Bethel, not as the house of God, but as Beth-aven, the house of emptiness or wickedness.

But who thought God would ever take back the land? Who could have ever predicted such a thing? Anyone who reads Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:63 - And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you.
And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

It seems that all roads in Hosea lead us back to Deuteronomy 28! When it comes to the history of the northern kingdom, Deuteronomy 28 and Hosea are like bookends.

Yes, God promised this people at Bethel that they would receive nations, kings, and land. But those promises were **conditional**, and we find the condition in Deuteronomy 28 - faithfulness to God. We see that condition in the very first verse.

Deuteronomy 28:1 - And **if** you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

The people of Hosea's day were faithless, and so rather than receiving the blessing of Deuteronomy 28:1, they would receive the curse of Deuteronomy 28:63 - "You shall be plucked off the land!"

Hosea 12:5

5 the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name:

Do you remember what we said about the final verse in Chapter 11?

That verse ended with the phrase “Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One,” and we wondered whether that phrase was a compliment of Judah or a criticism of Judah. And, despite the ESV translation, we concluded that it was a criticism.

And the specific criticism was that the priests of Baal in Judah were trying to be very clever. They were using vague words such as “El” that could refer to God or could refer to a false god depending on the context, and those clever priests were hoping that their vague statements would be acceptable to both the followers of God and the followers of Baal.

I think verse 5 confirms that we were on the right track with that understanding of Hosea 11:12.

Why? Because here Hosea reminds us of the **name** of the one true God who met with Jacob at Bethel and who talked with “us” at Bethel.

“The Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial name.”

Or as we read in the ASV:

“Even Jehovah, the God of hosts; Jehovah is his memorial name.”

There is no ambiguity in that verse. There is no generic description of deity in that phrase. There is no deliberate and deceptive vagueness in that statement.

No follower of Baal would ever hear that phrase and think that Hosea was talking about Baal. No follower of God would ever hear that phrase and wonder who Hosea was really talking about.

As one commentator describes verse 5:

“It is a grand name that calls to mind all the majesty and power of God... This was the name of the real God of Israel, the God who found Jacob and transformed him, and it is the name by which this God should be remembered. The implication is that this is the God whom the Israelites have not discovered.”

In the first half of verse 5, we find “**the Lord, the God of hosts.**”

Although this is the only verse in Hosea where we find that phrase, we know that the people were very familiar with that description of God. And how do we know that? We know that because the phrase “the Lord, the God of hosts” is used nine times in the book of Amos and twelve times in the book of Isaiah.

As we recall from our introduction to Hosea, Isaiah and Amos were prophesying at the same time as Hosea. But, unlike Hosea, Isaiah and Amos were from the south.

Also, Isaiah was sent to the southern kingdom, unlike Hosea, who was sent to the northern kingdom. And Amos, like Hosea, preached to the north even though Amos, unlike Hosea, was from the south.

The people listening to Hosea had also likely listened to Amos, and perhaps they had even heard about Isaiah and his message. If so, then they were already very familiar with this name for God - “the Lord, the God of hosts.”

And why was that particular name so important at this time? Because the Lord, the God of hosts, was at this time preparing to send a host against Israel!

God (not Baal) is the God of armies! And that difference was about to become evident to all when the Assyrian army showed up at the command of God as prophesied by the prophets of God to do the will of God. Baal could neither send nor stop an army.

Amos 3:13-15 - “Hear, and testify against the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord GOD, **the God of hosts**, that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions, I will punish the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground. I will strike the winter house along with the summer house, and the

houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end,” declares the LORD.

Baal, the so-called god of fertility, was in reality not a god of anything, including fertility and hosts. That is why Bethel (the house of God) became instead the house of emptiness when Baal moved in.

In the second half of verse 5, we find **“the Lord is his memorial name.”**

I think we could paraphrase that statement this way: “Jehovah is his name - and you had better remember it!”

As we saw at the end of Hosea 11, the priests it seems had been playing some games with the name of God by using vague generic titles that could apply to God or could apply to Baal.

And I think that is one reason why Hosea has been reminding them here about who God is through this history of God’s interactions with Jacob.

And that view is confirmed by the phrase we find here at the end of that historical review - this is the one true God! This is God Almighty! His name is Jehovah - and you had better remember it! No more words games!

By using the phrase “memorial name” in verse 5, Hosea is pointing us back to one of the great texts of the Bible.

Exodus 3:13-15 - Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ **This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**”

The Hebrew word (“zeker”) translated “remembered” in Exodus 3:15 is the same Hebrew word that is translated “memorial name” here in verse 5.

In the great model prayer of Matthew 6, the very first thing that Jesus told us to pray for is that God's name will be hallowed and honored. And not only were these people not praying for that, they themselves were not doing that!

Instead, they were playing games with God's name - they were dishonoring God's name by trying to appeal to God and to Baal with the same generic terms for deity.

The people needed to remember who it is they were dealing with. They needed a history lesson to remind them about the Lord God Almighty. And so Hosea has just given them one.

It is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob who said to Moses: "This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

The people did not know God, and they would soon be destroyed because of their lack of knowledge. We saw that back in Hosea 4:6, and we have been seeing it ever since!

Hosea 12:6

6 "So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God."

Hosea reviewed the life of Jacob to show that Israel had inherited Jacob's worst traits but had not inherited any of Jacob's best traits. Like Jacob, the people were striving with everyone, including God, but unlike Jacob, the people were not weeping and seeking God's favor.

Here in verse 6, Hosea tells the people what they need to do if they want to be like their ancestor Jacob. Here Hosea reminds them of Jacob's good points.

What did the people need to do? They needed to return to God and look to God for help. And if they are returning, that means that they had left God for someone else - and that someone else was Baal and the evil fertility cult of Canaan.

The Hebrew word used here for “return” implies an abandonment of where they had been. They were not just to leave Baal, but they were to abandon Baal.

And there is a lesson there for us. When we leave a sinful situation, we should not leave any doors cracked open through which we can later return to that situation. If we return to God with the thought that we might later return to that sinful situation when we grow tired of God, then that is not faithfulness; that is not loyalty. Instead, that is what these people had been doing - swapping back and forth from one god to another as they looked for the best offer.

That is not what God wants from his people, and we see that right here in verse 6: “hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.”

Hold fast. Wait continually.

Those phrases are not describing a people that swaps gods back and forth looking for the best offer. Instead, those phrases are describing the constancy and loyalty and faithfulness that God demands.

When we leave Baal, we don’t leave the door cracked open, but instead we abandon Baal, and we hold fast to love and justice, and we wait continually for God.

That is what Jacob did, eventually. But the people in Hosea’s day had not done that. But, again, even now, at this late point in their history, God was giving them an opportunity to repent.

And what did they need to do? Verse 6 tells us.

The phrase “hold fast to love and justice” was a shorthand way of saying that they needed to do all that God required in the Law of Moses, but especially “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).

And the phrase “wait continually for your God” describes an attitude of faith that seeks security in God rather than in wealth or position and that perseveres in faith even when circumstances are difficult.

In the context of Jacob’s example, the message is that if Israel would repent, they they would be like Jacob in the best sense rather than in the worst sense.

Hosea 12:7

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

Yes, Ephraim should have displayed the best traits of Jacob, but they had not. Instead, they were displaying the worst traits of Jacob. And I think that if we asked Hosea to describe those worst traits with a single word, that word would be **deception**.

Back in Hosea 11:12, we were told that “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit.” And then Hosea rehearsed the life of Jacob, which we know included great deception in his dealings with Isaac and Esau. There was also deception with Laban - although Laban gave back as good as he got!

And so perhaps we are not surprised here when Hosea compares Ephraim with a dishonest merchant. As one commentary describes it:

The rigged scales of the merchant are proverbial for loathsome dishonesty in trade. This kind of fraud, a way of cutting any corner to get ahead, is in the worst traditions of the Israelite merchant’s ancestor, Jacob.

Ancient dealers sometimes kept two sets of weighing stones, one for buying and one for selling. The Law of Moses forbid that practice.

Deuteronomy 25:13 - You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.

And elsewhere we are told how God feels about a false balance - it is an abomination.

Proverbs 20:23 - Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD, and false scales are not good.

But why? Why is a false balance so bad?

It is because a false balance includes within it many different sins including dishonesty, greed, arrogance, fraud, and oppression of the poor and weak. As verse 7 describes this merchant, “he loves to oppress.”

There is some word play here in verse 7. The Hebrew word translated “merchant” is the same Hebrew word that means “Canaan.” The implication is clear - rather than following God and removing the Canaanites from the land, Ephraim had followed Canaan and removed God from the land. And, as a result, the people were now just like the Canaanites.

I also love the word play that we find on this point in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 11:1-2 - A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight. When pride comes, then comes **disgrace**, but with the humble is wisdom.

The root of the Hebrew word translated “disgrace” in Proverbs 11:2 literally means **lightness**. What that proverb is telling us is that both the false weights and the dishonest people who use those false weights are claiming to be heavier than they really are!

Hosea 12:8

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

I think Hosea is still comparing and contrasting the people with their ancestor, Jacob. Why do I think that? Because the Hebrew word translated “wealth” here in verse 8 is the same Hebrew word that was translated “maturity” back in verse 3.

Also, Hosea just looked at what happened to Jacob at Bethel, and we know that Hosea now refers to Bethel as Beth-aven - not the house of God, but the house of emptiness or wickedness. And why is that important here? Because the Hebrew word translated “iniquity” in verse 8 is very similar to the Hebrew word “aven” in Beth-aven.

What we see in verse 8 is that **ancient** Ephraim had a **very modern** opinion of themselves: “Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”

“I have only myself to thanks for everything I have, and everything I do is right!” Yes, the attitude that we see here in verse 8 is a very modern attitude. The world, it seems, has always been full of self-made men who can do no wrong!

The attitude that we see in verse 8 is the attitude of the rich merchant who has just cheated a poor person by using false weights.

“I am rich” - meaning that he is above the law.

“I have found wealth for myself” - meaning that he can do whatever he wants to do in his quest to get whatever he wants to have.

“In all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin” - meaning that no one will ever be able to prove that he did anything wrong. He is confident that he will get away with it.

And, yes, that rich merchant might very well escape justice in a land filled with injustice and partiality - but that rich merchant will not escape the justice of God.

And those people today who have this same attitude need to learn that same lesson.

These rich merchants may have deceived the poor, but they were also deceiving themselves. These rich merchants may have mocked the poor, but God is not mocked.

Galatians 6:7 - Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Hosea 12:9

9 I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast.

What is your **least** favorite holiday?

If we directed that question to the people of Hosea’s day, I suspect they might all have given us the same answer - their most disliked holiday might have been the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. For the kids it might well have been their favorite holiday, but perhaps not so for the parents.

Why? What was so unlikable about that particular feast? The answer is that it involved leaving your comfortable home for a week so that you could instead live outdoors in a tent!

Leviticus 23:42–43 - You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

As the Handout for Lesson 40 shows, the Feast of Tabernacles came on the 15th day of the seventh month, Tishri, which was typically around the end of September or early October.

The Feast was primarily agricultural and celebrated the gathering of the harvest. In John 7:37 it is referred to as “The Feast.” The Rabbis said that “he who has not seen Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means.” (So perhaps the feast wasn’t as bad as it seems!)

Apart from its agricultural significance, the Feast of Tabernacles also commemorated the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites dwelt in tents and tabernacles. The people built booths or tabernacles with walls made of branches and thatched roofs and dwelt in them seven days. The Hebrew word for booths is Succoth from which the feast gets its Hebrew name.

On the first day of the feast 13 bulls were offered, 12 on the next day, 11 on the third, and so on until 7 were offered on the seventh day — making a total of 70 offerings. The rabbis taught that the number 70 depicted the number of nations in the world, which looked forward to a time when both Jew and Gentile would worship God together.

One of the most important rituals of this feast was the pouring of water in the temple. A specially appointed priest was sent to the Pool of Siloam with a golden pitcher to bring water from the pool. This was poured by the high priest into a basin at the foot of the altar amidst the blasting of trumpets and the singing of the Hallel (Psalm 113–118).

It was at the end of such a celebration that Jesus announced that he was the real source of living water in John 7:37–38.

The significance of this pouring was twofold. First, it was a symbolic and ritual prayer for abundant rain. Second, it looked toward the outpouring of God's spirit upon all nations as mentioned in Joel 2:28 and which Peter in Acts 2 says was fulfilled during the first century.

One thing to notice about this feast was its connection to agriculture and to water. Both of those things were gifts from God, but now the people were thanking Baal for both of those things.

And yet the feast continued. They were still going through the motions even after they had exchanged God with Baal!

The mention of this feast in verse 9 is a reminder of why they had been given that feast in the first place. The intent of the feast was for the people to remember what their lives had been like after they left Egypt and before they settled down in the promised land. The feast was designed to make them remember what God had done for them and to be thankful.

But the people were not thankful. They did not remember what God had done for them.

In Hosea 2:11, we saw that the people were still keeping the appointed feasts - but we also saw that they had forgotten the meaning of those feasts.

We saw that they had mixed the feasts of God with the worship of Baal. Most likely, this seven day feast of thanksgiving to God had instead become just a seven day campout during which they worshipped and thanked Baal.

And why had they done that? Because they did not know God.

That is why verse 9 starts the way it does: "I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt." Yes, verse 9 actually starts out with God introducing himself to the people!

When God the Son came to this earth, he was not recognized by many of his own people. I think we see something similar here with God the Father. His people are so far from him that, not only don't they know him, but they don't even recognize him.

And so God has to remind them who he is and what he did for them. "I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt."

Verse 9 is one of the saddest verses in Hosea, which (as we have said) is perhaps the saddest book in the Bible.

Ezekiel tells us that Judah followed the example of her “sister Samaria” and as a result experienced this same sad situation.

Ezekiel 23:35 - Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.

When people forget God and cast the word of God behind their back, the inevitable result is lewdness and whoring.

We see that fact with Israel here in Hosea, we see that fact with Judah in Ezekiel, and perhaps even today in our own world we can see some modern examples of that fact.

And, as we said, even though this feast was a very joyous occasion, I suspect that no one over the age of 12 really looked forward to that seven day campout!

And why do I think that? Because the threatened punishment in verse 9 is that God was going to turn that seven day holiday into a permanent holiday! You think living in a tent is bad for seven days - just wait until you do live in a tent for the rest of your life!

Their ancestors had been homeless wanderers for many years - and verse 9 tells them it was going to happen again. And we know that it did happen again - Israel was carried off by Assyria and scattered so that the people once again became just homeless wanderers.

Lesson 41

Hosea 12:10

10 I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets gave parables.

In just a few verses, Hosea has moved from Jacob to Egypt and now to the prophets. And again, we see that our first task in understanding Hosea is just to keep up with Hosea. Many verses in Hosea would be entire chapters in other books.

The message from God in verse 10 to the people is that they had been warned.

God says that he spoke to the prophets and multiplied visions. I think what that tells us is that, although the “prophets” in verse 10 certainly include the northern prophets we know about in the Bible such as Hosea and Amos, they also include many other prophets from God who did not leave us any written record.

Why so many? Because God was trying to get the people’s attention, and so God was sending them prophets and multiple visions to teach them and to warn them.

But why did God speak to them in parables or, as some translations say, in riddles? Why not tell them **plainly** what they need to do?

If you look at the Handout for Lesson 41, you can see that the parables in the Bible are not confined to just the New Testament. In fact, there are quite a few “parables” in the Old Testament.

But why do I put quotation marks around “parables”? Because many of the parables listed on the Handout are quite different from what we usually think of as a parable based on our experience in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, a parable is a story that teaches a lesson - but that story is something that could have really happened. New Testament parables are not fables - we do not see talking animals or talking trees, for example.

And in the Old Testament, some parables are like that - but not all parables are like that. For example, we see some parables that might better be called fables, such as the trees choosing a king in Judges 9 and the thistle talking to the cedar in 2 Kings 14.

And other parables in the Old Testament are not spoken, but rather are acted out, such as the woman of Tekoa in 2 Samuel 14 and the lost prisoner in 1 Kings 20.

In fact, we might need a better word than “parable” to describe what we find in the Old Testament, and perhaps that better word is “similitude.”

That is the word used in the KJV for verse 10, as shown at the bottom of the handout. And that word “similitude” seems a better fit for the Hebrew word “dama,” which just means to compare or liken something.

So what then is verse 10 telling us? It is telling us that the prophets often proclaimed God’s word by giving comparisons - this is similar to that. And, in fact, we have already seen Hosea himself do that many times in this book.

But why? Why did the prophets use similitudes? Why not instead use exactitudes? Why all the metaphors? Why all the riddles? Why all the parables?

Well, we might ask Jesus that same question. And, in fact, we already have the answer to that question.

Matthew 13:11-17 - And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled

that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. **For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed**, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Just as the people had refused to heed Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-10, so the people were refusing to heed Jesus in Matthew 13. In fact, Matthew 13 tells us that the prophecy in Isaiah 6 was also fulfilled by the people who rejected Jesus’s message. And that reaction from the people, Jesus says, is why he speaks in parables.

But why not just speak clearly? I think we just read the answer to that question: “For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed.”

We can speak clearly all day long, but if we are speaking to people who are blind and deaf, then our clear speech will not do them any good.

Yes, there is big problem described in Matthew 13, but that big problem is not a lack of clarity. The big problem described in Matthew 13 is that it is very difficult to teach (or even reach) people who close their eyes and cover their ears.

And so what is the solution? Well, one solution is to speak to them in parables.

But how is that a solution? It’s a solution because the people who cover their ears to avoid hearing a clear message will often listen to a parable - and in doing so, they might end up accidentally learning something! They uncover their ears just long enough listen to an interesting story, and they end up hearing the lesson they did not want to hear. It is like giving an educational toy to a child.

I think we see that with the New Testament parables.

Matthew 21:45 - When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

And we see the same thing in the Old Testament. Perhaps the best example is the story of the little ewe lamb that the prophet Nathan told King David in 2 Samuel 12. After that story, Nathan declared, "Thou art the man!" And when David heard that statement, he saw that story in a completely different light - and he learned something. But how would that event have transpired had Nathan spoken plainly right from the start?

Yes, Jesus could have told us with **only** very plain language that God loves us, that God wants us to repent, and that God does not want us to look down on those who sinned but later returned. But would anyone have preferred that over the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son?

Yes, Jesus sometimes told us those facts very plainly, but Jesus also told us those facts with parables that even two thousand years later are still touching the hearts and opening the ears of those who refuse to see and hear the gospel.

God always knows the perfect way to deliver his perfect message. God knows **what** we need to hear, and God **how** we need to hear it.

So, yes, the prophets often spoke very plainly.

Habakkuk 2:2 - And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it."

But sometime the prophets instead spoke using parables and riddles and strange metaphors, as we are told here in verse 10 and as we have seen in our study of Hosea.

Hosea's style is very different from Isaiah's style. But both books are the inspired word of God, and both books show us the perfect word of God delivered in the perfect way.

And, at the end of Israel's history, when the people had only a brief remaining window in which to repent, and when their eyes and their ears were closed to the word of God and to the prophets of God - at that time, God knew that the perfect way to deliver his word

was through prophets using strange parables and vivid metaphors that would first grab the listeners' attention, wake them up, and then perhaps end up teaching them something they otherwise would never have learned.

That was how Jesus was able to teach the Pharisees after they had closed their eyes and covered their ears - and that is how God was able to teach the people of Hosea's day after they had closed their eyes and covered their ears. And likewise with the other prophets:

Jeremiah 5:21 - Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.

Ezekiel 12:2 - Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.

We might now ask ourselves this same question. How can we today get through to people who have eyes, but do not see, and who have ears, but do not hear?

We know what they need to learn - God's word. And we know that God's word is living and active and powerful and endlessly fascinating. But how do we convey that word? How do we get people to listen to it?

I'm sure there are many good answers to that question, but one thing is certain - **we will never wake anyone up by being dull!** The very last thing a sleeping person needs is a sleeping pill.

If we aren't excited by God's word, then how will we ever get others to listen to God's word?

Yes, Jesus was completely without sin. But do you know what else Jesus was completely without? Dullness!

Jesus was never dull! And we shouldn't be either! I doubt that anyone ever dozed off while Jesus was talking to them! Yes, they may have covered their ears and gnashed their teeth, but their attention did not drift away.

I think there is a lesson there for anyone who purports to teach God's word. If we are excited about God's word, but we can't convey that

excitement to others - then that is a problem. But if we are **not** excited about God's word - then that is a bigger problem!

In my experience, my favorite teachers were the ones who had a genuine delight in their subject - be it tax law or vector calculus!

Hosea 12:11

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

Verse 10 told us that the prophets spoke in similitudes, so, to really drive home that point, verse 11 gives us a strange prophetic comparison. What does it mean?

Let's start by quickly reviewing what we know about the two locations in verse 11: Gilead and Gilgal. We have previously seen each of them in Hosea.

We saw Gilead in Hosea 6:8. Gilead was not a city, but was instead a region that included cities. But those cities in Gilead often used the name Gilead, such as with Jabesh-Gilead and Ramoth-Gilead, and so Gilead may have sometimes been used as a shorthand for a city, as it seems to have been back in Hosea 6:8.

And what happened in the region of Gilead? One thing that happened there is that King Pekah, the head of the anti-Assyrian faction in the civil war, based his operations in Gilead. After Pekah killed Pekahiah (the head of the pro-Assyrian faction), the civil war ended and Pekah moved his operations to Samaria in Ephraim. Most of Gilead was then soon taken over by Assyria.

So, with that short review, why is Gilead mentioned here?

We may see a clue back in Hosea 6:8.

Hosea 6:8 - Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.

There are, in fact, two clues in that verse, but those clues are very hard to see in English.

First, the Hebrew word translated “evildoers” in Hosea 6:8 is “aven” - the same word that Hosea has been using to describe Bethel (the house of God) as Beth-aven (the house of wickedness).

And, second, the Hebrew word translated “tracked” or “footprints” in Hosea 6:8 is “aqob,” which is the root word of the name “Jacob” (“ya-aqob”). And elsewhere that same Hebrew word is translated “deceitful.”

Jeremiah 17:9 - The heart is **deceitful** above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

And so, with those two clues, what can we say about Hosea 6:8? “Gilead is a city of **evildoers**, **tracked** with blood.”

What we can say is that anyone hearing Hosea say that would be thinking of at least three things - they would be thinking of Hosea’s use of the name **Beth-aven**, they would be thinking of **Jacob**, and they would be thinking of what happened to Jacob at **Bethel**.

Let’s now go back to Hosea 12:11 and ask our question again: why are Gilead and Gilgal mentioned here?

I think we can now answer that question when it comes to Gilead. Why? Because the Hebrew word translated “iniquity” in Hosea 12:11 is the same Hebrew word that was translated “evildoers” in Hosea 6:8 and is the same Hebrew word that Hosea has been using as a nickname for Bethel.

I think verse 11 mentions Gilead to bring our minds back to Jacob and back to Bethel.

And, of course, Gilead brings our minds back to Jacob for another reason - that is where Laban caught up with Jacob after he tricked him and fled.

Genesis 31:25-27 - And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of **Gilead**. And Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have **tricked** me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and

trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre?

But what happened to Jacob? Did he come to nothing? Absolutely not.

Jacob was reconciled with Laban, Jacob was reconciled with Esau, and Jacob was reconciled with God - wrestling with an angel at Penuel and meeting God again at Bethel.

Yes, Jacob struggled, but Jacob prevailed! Yes, Jacob struggled, but Jacob received grace! Yes, Jacob struggled, but Jacob was blessed by God and once again received the promises of God at Bethel.

But what about the people who were listening to Hosea? They, like Jacob were struggling. Would they, like Jacob, prevail? Would they, like Jacob, receive grace? Would they, like Jacob, receive the promises? No. They would not.

And why not? Because they did not know God. Because they had all of Jacob's bad qualities, but they had none of Jacob's good qualities.

The first half of the prophetic riddle in verse 11 is a very short restatement of what we have already seen in this chapter - if the people wanted to enjoy the promises given to Jacob, then the people needed to seek God and know God like their father Jacob.

So what then about the second half of verse 11? "In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls; their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field."

Why is Gilgal mentioned here?

We saw Gilgal in Hosea 4:15 and Hosea 9:15. Gilgal was where King Saul disobeyed God by failing to destroy all of the Amalekites, and so in Hosea 9:15, God said, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them." And back in Hosea 4:15, we saw how Gilgal had gone from being a shrine for pilgrims to instead being a center of apostasy.

So what then is verse 11 telling us about Gilgal? It is telling us that the people were still sacrificing bulls there, but those sacrifices

were meaningless because the city and the altars in Gilgal were all defiled.

Rather than allowing the people to get closer to God, their altars had instead become “like stone heaps on the furrows of the field.”

That is, those altars were doing the opposite of what they had been intended to do - they were keeping the people away from God. They had become just stumbling blocks in a field. They were preventing the people from plowing and harvesting. Their altars had become obstacles for the people rather than blessings for the people as God had intended.

We saw this same thing earlier in Hosea 8.

Hosea 8:11 - Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they have become to him altars for sinning.

As we discussed back in Lesson 30, those altars **for sinning** (that is, altars to deal with sin) had instead become altars **for sinning** (that is, altars providing an excuse to sin more and more)! Rather than dealing with their sin, the altars for their false gods had instead become the locations for their immoral worship of their false fertility gods.

I think we see the same message here in verse 11. The altars of stone had become only piles of stone, and those stones prevented the people from plowing and reaping as they should.

And so what can we say about verse 11? We can say that it is an excellent example of what we said about verse 10 - that God sometimes uses parables or riddles or vivid metaphors to reach people who might otherwise be unreachable. I think that is what the text of Hosea is doing right here in verse 11.

Hosea 12:12

12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram; there Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep.

The first thing we can say about verse 12 is that it confirms what we said about verse 11 - that verse was intended to remind us of Jacob.

And so now here in the next verse we have more than just a reminder of Jacob - we have an explicit mention of Jacob. The context about Jacob that started in verse 2 is continuing here in verse 12.

Back in verses 3-4 we saw an abbreviated account of some of the events in Jacob's life. Here in verse 12 see another event from Jacob's life.

First, we read: “Jacob fled to the land of Aram.”

This event is described in Genesis 27:41-28:5.

Esau threatens to kill Jacob, and Rebekah, his mother, hears about the plot. And so Rebekah gets Isaac to send Jacob to her brother Laban in Paddan-aram to keep Jacob from marrying a Canaanite woman. And it is on that journey to the land of Aram that Jacob has his first meeting with God at Bethel in Genesis 28:10-22.

Notice that Genesis 27:43 tells us that Laban was in Haran, but Genesis 28:2 tells us that Jacob went to Paddan-aram (from which we get “the land of Aram” here in verse 12).

Paddan-aram is either the area around Haran, or is possibly an Aramaic rendering of the city name Haran. This connection with Aram is why Jacob is called “a wandering Aramean” in Deuteronomy 26:5.

Second, we read: “There Israel served for a wife.”

This event is described in Genesis 29:1-30.

Jacob serves seven years for Rachel, the younger sister of Leah, but Laban tricks him and gives him Leah instead. And so Jacob agrees to serve another seven years for Rachel.

Third, we read: “And for a wife he guarded sheep.”

This event is described in Genesis 30:25-43, and also earlier in Genesis 29:9 where we are told that Rachel was a shepherdess.

And so verse 12 is a brief but straightforward account of Jacob's journey to live with Laban, of Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah, and of Jacob's service to Laban by guarding his sheep.

But **why** are we told these things in verse 12? Verse 13 will answer that question.

But before we get to verse 13, let's ask one more question about verse 12: why do we see both the name **Jacob** and the name **Israel** in this one verse?

I think the answer is simple - the text wants us to remember that Jacob changed. Jacob had a meeting with God, and Jacob was transformed. Yes, Jacob had his faults, but Jacob also had many good points. Jacob did not stay Jacob forever - Jacob became Israel!

I think there is a very profound message in the occurrence of both the name Jacob and the name Israel in this one short verse. Jacob changed, and so could the people who were listening to Hosea. God through Hosea repeatedly reminds the people of that wonderful fact, and through Hosea God also reminds us today of that same wonderful fact! Jacob became Israel!

Hosea 12:13

13 By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.

Our question about verse 12 was why the people were being reminded of those events from the life of Jacob. Verse 13 answers that question.

As we recall, we had the same question about verses 3-4. And the answer we found there was that God wanted the people to see how they had inherited Jacob's bad traits but had not inherited Jacob's good traits. That is why the great promises to Jacob and his offspring no longer applied to them even though they were Jacob's offspring.

As with verses 3-4, verse 12 is intended to teach the people a lesson from the life of Jacob - but the lesson in verse 12 is different from the lesson we saw earlier about verses 3-4.

So what is the lesson we are intended to see in verse 12? Verse 13 tells us we are intended to see something about the exodus and something about a prophet.

Now, for starters, those topics should not come as a surprise to us. Why not? Because we saw the exodus in verse 9, and we saw prophets in verse 10. Verses 12-13 are part of a context that already includes the exodus and prophets.

But what is the lesson here about those two topics? What do the events in verse 12 from Jacob's life teach us about the exodus? What do those events from Jacob's life teach us about a prophet?

As for the exodus, there are several similarities between what happened to Jacob in Haran and what happened to Jacob and his descendants in Egypt.

First, both Haran and Egypt are foreign lands that served as a place of refuge.

Jacob fled to Haran to keep Esau from finding him and killing him. And, later, Jacob and his family fled to Egypt to keep themselves from dying from a famine.

Second, both Haran and Egypt turned out to be more a place of servitude than a place of refuge.

Jacob sought refuge but ended up being tricked and having to serve Laban for 14 years to obtain Rachel's hand. Likewise, Jacob's descendants eventually met a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and ended up being oppressed and enslaved by those to whom they had fled for safety.

Third, both Haran and Egypt tried to prevent those who sought refuge from becoming wealthy and then leaving with that wealth.

We see that in Exodus 30 when Laban tried to trick Jacob by hiding the speckled and spotted goats and the black sheep that he had agreed Jacob could have.

Likewise, the Egyptians oppressed the descendants of Jacob because they feared "the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us" (Exodus 1:9). "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad" (Exodus 1:12). And so, Egypt "ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service" (Exodus 1:13-14).

Fourth, with both Haran and Egypt, God delivered those who had fled there for refuge.

With Jacob, we see a miracle in Exodus 30 by which “the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted” sheep and goats. And Jacob eventually fled from Laban taking his wealth with him.

Likewise, God miraculously delivered the descendants of Jacob from Egyptian servitude, and they also fled with wealth.

Exodus 12:36 - And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Fifth, in both Haran and in Egypt, those living there were tended.

The Hebrew word translated “guarded” in verse 12 (“for a wife he guarded sheep”) is the same Hebrew word translated “guarded” in verse 13 (“and by a prophet he was guarded”).

With Haran, it was the sheep who were tended or guarded. With Egypt, it was Israel who was tended or guarded. But in each case someone was watching out for them and was keeping them safe.

But who is the prophet in verse 13?

“By **a prophet** the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by **a prophet** he was guarded.”

That prophet, of course, is Moses. And we know that Moses was a prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:18 - I will raise up for them a prophet **like you** from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

That verse tells us two things. First, it tells us that Moses was a prophet. And second, it tells us that someday there would be another prophet who, like Moses, would proclaim God’s word to the people.

And, of course, we know that promised prophet was Jesus (Acts 3:22), the Messiah who (like Moses) came to deliver people from bondage and death and lead them to a wonderful promised land filled with blessings from God.

I think that connection with the Messiah is one reason why Moses is called a prophet twice in this verse.

But I think a second reason Moses is called a prophet here is that the people were intended to see in that description of Moses a connection between the prophet Moses and the prophet Hosea. When the people rejected Hosea, they were also rejecting Moses. And, as they rejected Moses and rejected Hosea, we know that many of them would later reject Christ.

Lesson 42

Hosea 12:14

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

We have already seen that Ephraim did not know God (4:6), that Ephraim did not love God (6:4), that Ephraim was not loyal to God (7:11), that Ephraim was sinning against God (8:11), and that Ephraim was lying to God (11:12).

Verse 14, I think, summarizes all of Ephraim's sins against God with a single description - Ephraim was **provoking** God. In fact, verse 14 tells us that Ephraim was **bitterly** provoking God.

And I think this word "provocation" points us to the root cause of **what** Ephraim had done and **why** they had done it - **idolatry**.

- Why did Ephraim not know God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim not love God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why was Ephraim not loyal to God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim sinning against God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.
- Why did Ephraim lying to God? Because they had forsaken God for Baal.

Idolatry was the root cause of their numerous sins against God, and I think idolatry remains the same root cause today.

When we think of our own sins, can't we say that they begin the moment we place something between us and God? Something that prevents us from loving God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength? (Mark 12:30) That is idolatry.

Idolatry was the root cause of sin in Hosea's day, and I think the same remains true today, which explains the frequent warnings that we find in the New Testament against idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:14 - Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 - Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

But back to verse 14 - why can we say that Ephraim's **provocation** of God is related to Ephraim's false idols? We can say that because of the Hebrew word translated "provocation."

What did Moses do after the people created their golden calf?

Deuteronomy 9:18 - Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to **provoke** him to anger.

That is the same word that we find here in verse 14.

And what did Moses tell the people shortly after the curses in Deuteronomy 28 and shortly before his death in Deuteronomy 34?

Deuteronomy 31:29 - For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, **provoking** him to anger through the work of your hands.

Again, that is the same word that we find here in verse 14.

That single word “provocation” here in verse 14 is taking us back to the golden calf in Deuteronomy 9 and back to the curses in Deuteronomy 28 - both of which are directly related to idolatry.

Deuteronomy 28:13-14 - And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, **if** you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, and **if** you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, **to go after other gods to serve them.**

Verse 14 tells us that God viewed Ephraim’s idolatry as a **bitter provocation.**

And what was the result of that bitter provocation?

We see two results of that bitter provocation in verse 14. First, Ephraim’s bloodguilt would not be removed, and second, Ephraim would be repaid for its disgraceful deeds.

The word translated “bloodguilt” refers to the blood of either humans or animals. Figuratively, that word signifies violence.

2 Samuel 16:8 - ...See, your evil is on you, for you are **a man of blood.**

2 Samuel 21:1 - ...There is **bloodguilt** on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.

Proverbs 1:11 - If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for **blood**; let us ambush the innocent without reason.”

Ezekiel 18:10 - If he fathers a son who is violent, a shedder of **blood**, who does any of these things.

But what was the bloodguilt of Ephraim? What violence had they committed?

It is possible that Ephraim’s bloodguilt included child sacrifice.

In verse 2 of the next chapter, we will see a verse that **may** suggest that the people were regularly offering human sacrifices to their

golden calves. I think that conclusion is doubtful, but let's save that discussion for Hosea 13:2.

But even without human sacrifice, Ephraim was still guilty of violence and bloodshed. In the first verse of Chapter 12, we were told that "they multiply falsehood and **violence**."

And we know that a big part of that violence was the violence from Assyria. But how was Ephraim guilty for what Assyria did to them?

We already know that answer to that question - Assyria invaded Ephraim because King Hoshea switched his allegiance to Egypt. There was a direct line between the violence inflicted by Assyria and the bad decision of King Hoshea. And, of course, we know that Assyria was sent as a punishment by God for Ephraim's disobedience. So, yes, I think Ephraim could be blamed for the violence that came upon them.

But I think Ephraim was also guilty of its own violence - violence, not that Assyria committed, but that Ephraim committed.

We haven't mentioned Jezreel in quite a while, but, as we recall, Jezreel was Hosea and Gomer's first child. And we also recall why Jezreel was given that strange name.

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

Again, as we recall, Jehu's actions at Jezreel almost led to the complete destruction of the line of King David. And that outcome is quite ironic. Why? Because Hosea 1:4 tells us that Jehu's actions actually led, not to the end of Judah, but to the end of Israel.

And Hosea has also pointed to Israel's bloodshed elsewhere.

Hosea 4:2 - There is swearing, lying, **murder**, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, **and bloodshed follows bloodshed**.

Hosea 6:8 - Gilead is a city of evildoers, **tracked with blood**.

So what then is the message of verse 14?

The first message is that “his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him” - that is, on Ephraim. That guilt would not be removed, but it would remain - and so the punishment for that bloodshed would also remain.

And the second message is that God “will repay him for his **disgraceful deeds**.” What does that mean?

I think the KJV translation is better: “and his **reproach** shall his Lord return unto him.” The Hebrew word translated “disgraceful deeds” in the ESV just means reproach or rebuke.

But upon whom was Ephraim casting that reproach? God.

By disregarding God’s law and by giving honor to Baal, the people were showing their contempt for God - they were casting reproach upon God. And so God tells Ephraim that he would return that reproach to them.

And, once again, we are reminded of a truth that we have seen very often in this book - God always has the last word! In fact, when it comes to Israel, Hosea, in many ways, is that last word. Hosea was the last prophet to Israel giving God’s last word to Israel.

One more comment about verse 14 - notice the phrase, “**so his Lord**.”

In what sense was God still Ephraim’s Lord? Ephraim was disobedient; was God still their Lord? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

The word “Lord” denotes God’s ownership of Ephraim and at the same time downgrades the quality of the relationship between the two parties from a covenant relationship to one of master and slave.

And that may very well be the intent here, but I also think there is a lesson here for us.

Yes, the people Ephraim needed to do many things if they wanted to restore a right relationship with God, but one thing they did **not** need to do was to make God the Lord of their life! God was already their Lord - that is what verse 14 tells us. They didn’t need to make

God anything - instead they needed to make themselves into obedient people!

I think that sometimes we see **ourselves** as the fixed point rather than God. We make Jesus Lord or we crown Jesus king, as if Jesus was not already Lord and already King. It is God who changes not (Malachi 3:6), not us. It is Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), not us. We are not the fixed point in the relationship. We are the ones who are commanded to change.

We sometimes hear that we need to make Jesus the Lord of our life (and I suppose we could twist our necks in an attempt to view that phrase in a way that makes sense), but is that what Peter proclaimed in Acts 2? No, it is not. Is that what Peter told the people they needed to do? No, it is not. Peter said the opposite.

Acts 2:36-38 - "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that **God has made him both Lord and Christ**, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Peter did not tell them that they needed to make Jesus Lord. Instead, Peter told them that Jesus was already Lord - and they needed to obey him!

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14) - and what that title means is that Jesus is everyone's King and everyone's Lord.

I think we see that fact right here in verse 14 when it comes to God the Father - God was Ephraim's Lord even while Ephraim was on the side of Baal. In fact, these punishments were coming because God was their Lord, and because they had been disobedient to their Lord.

Likewise, today, we do not obey Jesus to make him our Lord and our King - we obey Jesus because he is already our Lord and our King. If he were not, then why must we obey him?

We do not make Jesus Lord and we do not crown Jesus king. God the Father did both of those things. The only crown that mankind ever placed on the head of Christ was a crown of thorns.

The question is not whether Jesus is our Lord and our King - he is. Instead, the question is whether we are his faithful subjects.

Introduction to Hosea 13

Before we start with verse 1 of Hosea 13, let's look at the theme of this chapter. What is the theme of Hosea 13? I think we will find that the theme of Hosea 13 is found in the final word of verse 1 - **death**.

As one commentary noted, Hosea 13 is permeated with the stench of death. It begins with the death of Ephraim, and it ends with little ones dashed in pieces and pregnant women ripped open.

But there is something truly wonderful about this strange chapter of death, and it is this: later when Paul penned the most wonderful chapter in the Bible about the resurrection, he quoted a verse from this terrible chapter of death.

1 Corinthians 15:55 - O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?

Hosea 13:14 - I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

We will have much more to say about that verse later, but for now we can certainly say this: even though those two chapters do cross paths in one verse, there is a great difference between the death and despair of Hosea 13 and the life and hope of 1 Corinthians 15. And we know the source of that great difference.

John 1:4 - In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

From death and darkness to life and light. Jesus transformed the terrible chapter of death in Hosea 13 into the wonderful chapter of life in 1 Corinthians 15. Absent Christ coming to this world, all any of us would have is Hosea 13. And for those outside of Christ today, all they have is Hosea 13.

Romans 7:24-25 - Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Let's begin with the first verse of this terrible chapter of death.

Hosea 13:1

1 When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel, but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.

We have talked a lot about the great prophecy of Deuteronomy 28. God told the people that if they proved faithless, they would be plucked off the land. And that prophecy was now being fulfilled with the Assyrian invasion of Ephraim.

We have also talked a lot about Jacob, and how Ephraim had inherited Jacob's bad qualities without inheriting any of Jacob's good qualities.

Verse 1 also points to the fulfillment of a great prophecy and also involves Jacob, but it is a **different** prophecy than Deuteronomy 28 and it is a **different** event in the life of Jacob - his blessing of Ephraim.

Genesis 48:17-19 - When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater

than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.”

You can see an artistic depiction of that event on the Handout for Lesson 42.

As Jacob was greater than his older brother Esau, so Ephraim would also be greater than his older brother Manasseh. And we know that prophecy was fulfilled, not just by Ephraim the **person**, but by Ephraim the **tribe**.

We see that preeminence in the leaders who came from Ephraim. Joshua and Samuel were both from the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8, 1 Samuel 1:1).

We also see the preeminence of the tribe of Ephraim in Moses’ blessing.

Deuteronomy 33:17 - ...they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

Ephraim was the most prominent northern tribe. It was located in the center of Israel between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and it was just north of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Ephraim was known as the heartland of Israel because of its plentiful resources, its favorable topography, and its robust and fertile soil. It was a hilly region that received more rainfall than Judah. (See the photos on the Handout.)

The northern kingdom was led by Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, who established Shechem as its first capital.

And so here in verse 1 we read: “When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he was exalted in Israel.”

As one commentary says:

This verse “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.”

That statement describes the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy when he placed the younger son Ephraim over his older brother Manasseh. The tribe of Ephraim carried great weight among the people and was exalted over the other tribes.

Ephraim had been promised much, and Ephraim had been given much. Ephraim had been greatly blessed by God. But Ephraim was thanking Baal for those great blessings. And the result? Verse 1 tells us that Ephraim incurred guilt through Baal and died.

Ephraim died. Past tense.

I don't think we need to conclude from the tense of that verb that Assyria had already carried them off. Instead, I think what we see there is the **prophetic past tense** - when something is so certain to occur than it is spoken about in the past tense.

The great tribe of Ephraim would soon pass into history never to return. And we know that happened when Assyria invaded Ephraim and removed the people from their land.

And **why** did Ephraim die? Was it because they chose Egypt over Assyria? Was it because they made some terrible military mistake? Was it because they chose the wrong earthly king to rule them? Was it because they didn't vote for the other guy? Was it because their economy collapsed? They could have survived all of that with God on their side - but they had cast God aside.

Why did Ephraim die? Verse 1 answers that question with a single word - **Baal**.

Verse 1 tells us that the root cause of Ephraim's fall from its high place was Baal. And that is the same thing we saw in the previous verse - idolatry was the root cause of their bitter provocation of God.

Ephraim died when Ephraim replaced God with Baal.

But here we should pause and recall what we have already learned about that shift from God to Baal - the people did not see it as a shift at all!

The people thought they were still worshiping God. They had mixed the worship of God with the worship of Baal, and they saw nothing wrong with that mixture. They were pleased by it, and they thought God must also be pleased by it.

And isn't that attitude still common today with religious error? That if like something, then God must also like it as well? You especially hear that a lot when people start deviating from the pattern of worship that we find in the New Testament. I like electric guitars, so God must like them also - right?

Here is how Ephraim saw things: "Yes, we are still worshipping God. Yes, we are still keeping the feasts and the festivals. Yes, we are offering sacrifices. But we are also doing these many other things. We are also worshipping Baal, and keeping the feasts for Baal, and sacrificing to Baal. What could be wrong with that?"

God had told them long before what was wrong with that.

Deuteronomy 5:6-9 - I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Isaiah 42:8 - I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

And Jesus told us the same thing.

Matthew 6:24 - No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

When it comes to God, there is no such thing as divided loyalty. Why? Because once my loyalty to God is divided, then it is no longer loyalty to God at all. "No man can serve two masters." Not that we **shouldn't** do that - but that we **can't** do that. It is impossible. I cannot be loyal to both.

I think we all understand the problem of divided loyalty when it comes to a marriage. I think we all see the problem with a husband

who tries to mix his “love” for his wife with his love for another woman.

And if we see the problem in that marriage context, then we should immediately see the problem in this context in Hosea. Why? Because the central theme of Hosea is spiritual adultery.

If we know how a husband feels when he discovers that his wife is seeing someone else, then we know how God feels when his people are worshipping someone else. The entire book of Hosea is intended to make us understand that.

In neither case do we see divided loyalty, as if loyalty can be sliced and diced and still remain loyalty. Instead, what we see in both cases is a terrible betrayal. And Ephraim died because of it.

And there is something quite ironic in the death of **Ephraim** because of Baal? Why? Because Baal was the god of fertility, and the name “Ephraim” means “doubly fruitful.”

So here is the riddle - what do you get when you combine the god of fertility with the people of double fruitfulness? Do you get *triple* fruitfulness? No. You get death and devastation and despair and darkness and destruction. Oh, the irony!

Hosea 13:2

2 And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of them, “Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!”

We can divide verse 2 into two parts - the easy half and the incredibly difficult half. Let’s start with the easy half.

Verse 2a - And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves metal images, idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen.

That part of the verse is straightforward restatement of some things we have already been told about Ephraim - that their sin was increasing and that their idolatry was increasing.

And, as we have also seen, that sin is connected very closely to that idolatry. The idolatry itself was a sin, of course, but that idolatry led to many other sins such as sexual immorality, ingratitude, and deceitfulness.

The description here of their idols is interesting - "idols skillfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen."

That description reminds us of what Moses commanded regarding the construction of the tabernacle.

Exodus 35:10 - Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded.

Here in verse 2 the craftsmen were also very skillful, but they were not using their talent for God. Instead, they were using their skill to honor Baal.

The crafting of molten images was expressly forbidden in the Law of Moses.

Exodus 34:17 - You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal.

But, despite that prohibition, every important archeological dig in Israel has turned up examples of such idols. They are usually highly-sexualized female figures, fashioned of precious metals or of clay.

And, once again, verse 2 points us back to the curses *in* (or, in this case, *near*) Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 27:15 - Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.

And there is an important lesson for us today in verse 2. The defining characteristic of all false religions is that they are all **man-made** - as we see here with these man-made images.

The church of Christ is the church that was built **by Christ** - the church is **not** a man-made organization. We see that wonderful truth about the church in the great prophecy of Daniel 2.

Daniel 2:44-45 - And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, **just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand**, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

An interesting study is to go through the Bible and see what God has to say about the works of human hands. Here is one example:

Acts 17:24-25 - God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, **dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands**, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

The world today is full of man-made churches! And many of them appear very large and very impressive by human standards. They were very skillfully crafted by the hand of man. But there is only one church built by Jesus Christ! There is only one church **of Christ**. (And that is not our name; it is our description.) There is only one body of Christ.

That was the easy half of verse 2. Let's look next at the incredibly difficult half of verse 2.

Verse 2b - It is said of them, "Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!"

There are some translation issues with that part of verse 2, but before we look at those issues, let's start with the big issue that is presented by the ESV translation: **were the people of Israel regularly practicing child sacrifice?**

And why do I say "regularly"? Because the Hebrew verb used here implies that this verse is concerned with a sin that the people routinely committed rather than with occasional examples of some sin.

And we know that child sacrifice was practiced by the people at least occasionally.

2 Chronicles 33:6 - And he [King Manasseh of Judah] burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers.

2 Kings 16:3 - But he [King Ahaz of Judah] walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.

Jeremiah 32:35 - They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

So we know that child sacrifice was practiced on occasion by some of the leaders, but was it a regular practice by the people? That is our question.

Lesson 43

When we stopped last week we were looking at the very difficult phrase at the end of Hosea 13:2 - “**It is said of them, ‘Those who offer human sacrifice kiss calves!’**”

Based on what we looked at last week, we know that child sacrifice was practiced on occasion by at least a few of the leaders, but was it a regular practice by the people? That is our question.

The obscure phrase at the end of verse 2 in the ESV suggests that perhaps it was: “It is said of them, ‘**Those who offer human sacrifice** kiss calves!’”

But the ESV translation of verse 2 that gives us the phrase “human sacrifice” is not the only possible translation.

- [KJV] - They say of them, Let **the men that sacrifice** kiss the calves.
- [RSV] - **Sacrifice** to these, they say. **Men** kiss calves!

As we see in the KJV translation, the Hebrew phrase translated “human sacrifice” in the ESV can simply mean “humans who sacrifice.”

In my opinion, either the KJV or RSV translation is better than the ESV translation of verse 2, and I prefer the KJV over the RSV. And I do **not** think that human sacrifice was a regular, widespread practice in Israel at this time (and perhaps not at any time).

Why not at this time? Well, by now we know Hosea pretty well, and so let’s ask ourselves a question about Hosea the person: if the people were regularly sacrificing their children to Baal, do we think we would really be struggling here in verse 2 near the end of his book to figure out whether or not Hosea had anything to say about it?

Would we expect to see only a passing reference to child sacrifice by Hosea (as perhaps we see here)? Or do we instead think that Hosea would be boldly charging the people with that unthinkable sin at

each and every opportunity? I think it is the latter. I think one thing we can say now with certainty about Hosea is that he was not shy!

There is no explicit condemnation of child sacrifice in the book of Hosea, and that fact alone makes me conclude that child sacrifice was **not** a regular and widespread practice by the people.

If that view is correct, then what does the second half of verse 2 mean? Let's read it again from the KJV - "They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves."

As we saw last week, the first half of verse 2 described how they **made** their silver idols. I think the second half of the verse is now describing how they **used** those silver idols - not only did they **worship** those idols and **sacrifice** to those idols, but they even **kissed** those idols.

As we know, our immediate context here includes Bethel, and we know that the calf worshipping cult was based in Bethel, having been established there by the first northern king, Jeroboam, in 1 Kings 12:28-29.

And we know that our immediate context also includes the exodus, and we know the original calf worshipping episode occurred shortly after the people left Egypt in Exodus 32.

So, with Bethel and the Egyptian exodus as our context, we are not at all surprised to see the worship of a golden calf here in verse 2.

The people were **crafting** those golden calves. The people were **worshipping** those golden calves. The people were **kissing** those golden calves. And in doing those things, the people were **sinning** more and more. I think that is what verse 2 is telling us. They were crafting, worshipping, kissing, and sinning.

There is one more thing we should say about this kiss in verse 2 before we move on. There is another kiss we should consider, and that kiss comes from the great Messianic Second Psalm.

Psalm 2:12 - Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The honor the people were giving that golden calf was the honor that they should have instead given the Messiah. That kiss of theirs is perhaps the surest indicator yet of just how far these people had fallen. They were kissing the calf (verse 2) rather than kissing the Son (Psalm 2).

Paul later penned the perfect description of such people.

Romans 1:25 - They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!

They worshipped the creations of their own hands rather than the Creator.

Hosea 13:3

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

This verse expands upon a verse from the previous chapter.

Hosea 12:11 - If there is iniquity in Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing.

The people may have thought that they were big players on the world stage. They may have thought that they were heavyweights when it came to spiritual matters. They may have thought that they were permanent residents on their promised land. But none of that was true.

Instead, the people were like a morning mist or like swirling chaff on a threshing floor or like smoke coming out of a window while someone is cooking.

One of the most important things we should do whenever we study the word of God is to always endeavor to see things as God sees them. Why?

Because if we want to know the truth about something, then the way to do that is to see that thing as God sees it. And how do we know how God sees something? The Bible tells us.

How does God view me? How does God view this world? How does God view the universe? How does God view the nations of the world? How does God view the church? The Bible answers all of those questions. And if we want to view all of that correctly, then we need to determine that Biblical view.

What was the big problem among the people here in Hosea 13? I think it was that they were not seeing things as God saw them. And, in particular, verse 3 tells us that they were not seeing themselves as God saw them.

In their mind, they were permanent heavyweights. But God did not see them that way. Instead, God viewed them as transient lightweights.

So which was it? Heavyweight or lightweight? Permanent or transient? Once we know how God viewed them, then we have an answer to that question - and that is always the case. God's view of something is always the true view of that thing.

The people here did not see themselves as God saw them, and that tells us the people did not have a correct view of themselves. And the first thing that had to change if they were to repent and turn to God was that they needed to see themselves as God saw them.

And the same is true today. The first step in reaching people with the gospel is to show them how God sees them - yes, that God loves them, but also that they are lost while they are outside of Christ.

Verse 3 begins with the word "therefore," which tells us that the condition of the people in verse 3 is a result of their sin in verse 2.

The people would come to nothing because of their idolatry. They would float away like smoke because they had placed their trust in Baal.

And, yes there is a sense in which the condition in verse 3 is a condition that applies to all mankind.

James 4:14 - What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

But I think verse 3 is saying more than that. I think verse 3 is describing how quickly and how easily the people would be carried off by Assyria.

They may have seen themselves as permanent heavyweights, but that would not be at all how Assyria saw them! To Assyria, Ephraim would be - not a mountain - but a speed bump. As one commentary describes them:

“The Ephraim that once struck terror in the hearts of its neighbors has become a vanishing smoke.”

That was how they ended. But how had they started? What had Ephraim been promised?

1 Kings 11:38 - And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and **will build you a sure house, as I built for David**, and I will give Israel to you.

They had been promised an enduring house, like that of King David, but that promise had been a conditional promise - and Ephraim had not satisfied that condition.

And the result? Rather than being an enduring house, Ephraim had become just a brief blip on the timeline of history. They would not endure, and they would lose their house.

Hosea 13:4

4 But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior.

Verse 4 is the final place where Egypt is mentioned in the book of Hosea. As we have seen, the Egyptian Exodus has been a major theme of the book, with God promising in effect a reverse Exodus at the end of Israel's history because of their disobedience.

And once again we see God reminding the people about who he is - “But I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt.”

The word “but” in that phrase contrasts God with Baal. They had been worshipping Baal and looking to Baal for their deliverance - but it was God who had delivered them from Egypt, not Baal.

If it were not for God, they would all still be living as slaves in Egypt. Baal had done nothing for them, but God had done everything for them.

And what happened after God led the people out of Egypt? God gave them his law. And I think we also see that event in verse 4.

Once again, I do not like the ESV translation here - “you know no God but me.” I think the KJV is better - “thou **shalt** know no god but me.”

That verse is a commandment (as in the KJV) rather than a statement of fact (as in the ESV). In fact, far from a statement of fact (“**you know** no God but me”), Hosea has made it clear that the people did **not** know God. And so I prefer the KJV: “**thou shalt know** no god but me.”

And, with that translation, we see the law of God in verse 4 because verse 4 reminds us immediately of the first commandment in Exodus 20.

Exodus 20:2-3 - I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:2 sounds just like the first half of Hosea 13:4, and Exodus 20:3 sounds **almost** like the second half of Hosea 13:4.

Why do I say **almost**? Because there is a slight difference between the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 and what we see here in verse 4.

Exodus 20:3 - You shall **have** no other gods before me.

Hosea 13:4 [KJV] - Thou shalt **know** no god but me.

Here in verse 4, God restates that first commandment, but he does so in a way that emphasizes what is perhaps the central message of Hosea - knowledge of God. “Thou shalt **know** no god but me.”

Now, we understand that the word “know” in the Bible sometimes refers to marital relations. But, of course, we also understand that is not always the case. What about here?

I think the word “know” here in verse 4 does include that knowledge between a husband and wife. Why? Because it reminds the people of their spiritual adultery. God had protected them as a husband protects his wife, but they did not **know** him. Instead, they knew Baal. They had left God for someone else.

As we know, spiritual adultery is the central metaphor of Hosea. But, as we also know, it was much more than just a metaphor for Hosea - it was his actual life with Gomer.

That central metaphor, I think, is why God here restates this command in a way that emphasizes the lack of knowledge that would destroy this adulterous people (Hosea 4:6).

The book of Hosea started with that theme, and the book of Hosea ends with that theme. Israel had committed spiritual adultery - even though the very first command of the ten commandments required them to remain faithful and loyal to God.

But maybe Israel would fare better with her new husband. Perhaps Baal would be able to protect and deliver the people. Verse 4 says no - “besides me there is no savior.” Baal could not protect anyone. Baal could not deliver anyone. Baal could not save anyone.

And what about us today? We, like Israel, have also been delivered from bondage.

Hebrews 2:14-15 - Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And **deliver them** who through fear of death were all their lifetime **subject to bondage**.

And we, like Israel, are sometimes tempted to look elsewhere for deliverance - maybe politics, or science, or money, or military might.

But the message for us today is the same as the message in verse 4 - “besides me there is no savior.”

Acts 4:12 - And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

The church is the bride of Christ, and we must always be faithful and true to our husband. If we ever look elsewhere for salvation, then we like Ephraim will be guilty of spiritual adultery.

Hosea 13:5

5 It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought;

In verse 4, we said that the word “know” included the knowledge between a husband and wife and was pointing us to our central theme of spiritual adultery. Verse 5 confirms that we were on the right track with verse 4.

“It was I who knew you in the wilderness.” That phrase brings us back to something we read near the beginning of the book.

Hosea 2:14-16 - Therefore, behold, I will allure her, **and bring her into the wilderness**, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. **And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’** and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’

As we saw in Lesson 12, those verses from Hosea 2 were looking to the restoration of the marriage bond that would occur later under the Messiah.

But here in verse 5, we are not looking forward, but rather we are looking backward. God is remembering the days of Israel’s youth when God rescued them as a husband rescues his wife and when God knew them in the wilderness as a husband knows his wife.

Verse 5 tells us that God was Israel’s husband, but we know that marriage bond had broken down. We know that Israel had committed spiritual adultery, and we know that now God called them Not

Loved and Not Mine. God had cast them away, and they would soon find themselves back where they had started - in bondage.

And why had the people done that? Why had the people rejected God as their husband? Why had the people run off with someone else? Why had the people forgotten how God had protected them in the wilderness, in the land of drought?

Verse 6 answers those questions.

Hosea 13:6

6 but when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

In verse 1 we saw that Ephraim had been exalted by God. Ephraim had received great blessings from God.

But Ephraim grew wealthy and forgot God. Ephraim had been given much but gave little. Why? Because Ephraim believed its blessings came from its own power and from its own might.

“But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.”

We also saw that attitude in the previous chapter.

Hosea 12:8 - “Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin.”

Here in verse 6 the imagery is that of sheep with a shepherd (“when they had grazed”). That image is even easier to see with the KJV translation: “**According to their pasture**, so were they filled.”

The picture we see in verse 6 is that of sheep who are cared for by a shepherd, but who forget their shepherd and start acting like they are the ones who placed themselves in that pasture. These people are not just sheep - they are sheep in charge!

Yes, it is a ridiculous image when we think of it in terms of sheep forgetting their shepherd - but is the situation any less ridiculous when the people of God forget God? The Lord is our shepherd! What if we forget our own shepherd? What if we act like sheep in charge?

God had earlier warned the people about ever having such a view of their blessings and their wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:17-19 - Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

And here in Hosea 13 we see a fulfillment of that prophecy from Deuteronomy 8. As we read earlier in Hosea 13:1, Ephraim was exalted, but Ephraim "incurred guilt through Baal and died."

Ephraim did not remember the true source of their blessings and their wealth, but instead Ephraim was thanking Baal for those blessings.

And Hosea 12:8 told us that Ephraim was also thanking themselves for those blessings - "I have found wealth for myself." I think we see that same attitude here in verse 6 - "their hearts were lifted up." Once again, we see a self-made man with no need of God.

But whether they were thanking Baal or thanking themselves, one thing is certain - they were not thanking God. Verse 6 tells us that they had forgotten God.

They became full. They were filled. Their heart was lifted up. And they forgot God. They were complacent. They were ungrateful. And they were focused, not on God, but only on the blessings God had given them. And eventually they forgot the source of those blessings.

There are many lessons for us in verse 6.

First, we need to recognize that a time of great blessings can also be a time of great spiritual peril. Why? Because it is easy to forget

the source of those blessings and to fall into the same trap in which Ephraim fell.

Paul described the danger:

Philippians 4:11-12 - Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, **and I know how to abound**. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing **plenty** and hunger, **abundance** and need.

In which circumstance is it easier to trust in God? When I am brought low or when I abound? When I face hunger or when I face plenty? When I face need or when I face abundance? I think we all know the answers to those questions.

The great temptation that arises when we are greatly blessed is to start viewing those blessings as something we did for ourselves. That is what Ephraim did, but we know that they were not the only people ever to have done so. Ephraim provides a lesson for us about the danger of abundance.

And there is second lesson we can learn here. For those who are greatly blessed by God - either then or today - something else comes along with those great blessings - they bring with them great responsibility.

Luke 12:48 - Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.” That statement should be a constant and sobering reminder to all who have been greatly blessed by God.

Ephraim misused their great blessings. They did not use their blessings for the glory of God. Instead, they forgot God. And, again, we know they were not the only people ever to have done so.

Hosea 13:7-8

7 So I am to them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. 8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

We have seen some strange metaphors in Hosea, but these in verses 7-8 are some of the strangest. God is like a lion. God is like a leopard. God is like a bear. God is like a wild beast.

The first thing that strikes us about these verses is their brutality. God is lurking like a leopard. God is falling upon them like a bear. God is tearing them open and devouring them like a lion. As one commentary describes it:

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.

What we see here is a perfect example of what we learned in Hosea 12:10 about how God speaks to people who need to be awakened. God knows what we need to hear, and God knows how we need to hear it. And here we again see God delivering his perfect word in the perfect way.

What if you saw a fire back in the kitchen during our Bible class today? What would you do? What would you say? How would you say it? And if you failed to get our attention, would you just give up? Or would you try some other way to get our attention - to let us know the danger we are in?

Here in Hosea 13, Ephraim's house was on fire, and God through Hosea was trying everything possible to get their attention. When we see the brutality in verses 7-8, I think we can picture God pulling the fire alarm! Maybe this will jolt them out of their stupor! Maybe this will wake them up!

As for the specific metaphors in these verses, I think most are self-explanatory.

But there is some word play in verse 7. As always, these words have been chosen very carefully. With just a slight change in pronunciation, the phrase “like a leopard I will lurk beside the way” would instead mean “and Assyria shall be like a leopard by the way.”

The metaphor of a bear robbed of her cubs reminds us of a verse in Proverbs.

Proverbs 17:12 - Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly.

Here in verse 8, God is that she-bear, and his people are his cubs. But God has been robbed of those cubs. They have been stolen by Baal and by the priests of Baal. And so God will fall on those who stole his children just like a she-bear would fall on those who stole her cubs.

Lesson 44

Hosea 13:7-8 (Continued)

7 So I am to them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. 8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

There is an interesting similarity between these two verses in Hosea and two other books in the Bible - Daniel and Revelation.

Here in Hosea 13:7-8 we see four animals: a lion, a leopard, a bear, and an unidentified wild beast.

In Daniel 7:3-7, we also see four animals: a lion in verse 4, a bear in verse 5, a leopard in verse 6, and a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong, in verse 7.

And in Revelation 13, we again see four animals.

Revelation 13:1-2 - And I saw a **beast** rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. And the beast that I saw was like a **leopard**; its feet were like a **bear's**, and its mouth was like a **lion's** mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

When we studied Daniel, we discovered the identity of those four animals. The great beast was Rome, the leopard was Greece, the bear was Persia, and the lion was Babylon.

And here in verses 7-8 we see the same four animals. Is that correspondence just an interesting similarity, or is there a connection of some sort?

We can't say for sure, but perhaps God in these two verses is once again looking forward through time to the day when Christ would come during the days of Rome to bless the entire world.

In Hosea's day, God had raised up Assyria to do his will on earth, but before Christ came, God would also raise up Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome to accomplish his plans. And it would be during the days of those first century Romans kings that Jesus would come to establish his eternal kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

If there is a connection between Hosea 13, Daniel 7, and Revelation 13, then I think the message is simple, and it is a message that we have already seen in this book with regard to Assyria - **these great kingdoms of the earth were raised up by God to do the will of God.** When God whistled, these nations all came running.

But Assyria did not understand that. When the Assyrian envoy later came to Jerusalem here is what he said:

Isaiah 36:18-20 - Beware lest Hezekiah mislead you by saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

But here is what happened in the next chapter.

Isaiah 37:33-36 - Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. **And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.**

Assyria was just a tool in the hand of God for God to use however he pleased and whenever he pleased. Assyria did not understand that at first, but Assyria learned that lesson the hard way!

And that was also a lesson that the great king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon also learned the hard way after we bragged about all that he had done and then was sent by God to live in the field like an ox for seven years! Yes - the great King Nebuchadnezzar really was outstanding in his field!

We must never doubt the lesson that King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way in Daniel 4.

Daniel 4:25 - You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that **the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.**

That was true of Assyria. That was true of Babylon. That was true of Persia. That was true of Greece. And that was true of Rome. If there is a message in the particular choice of animals in verses 7-8, then I think it is that.

So where are we at the end of verse 8? Here is how one commentary answers that question:

This attack leads to the nation's death, not just its wounding! Israel will be left after God's judgment like the carcass of a sheep slain by a beast of prey — jackals and dogs will devour the leavings. The end is absolute. In this oracle, Hosea sees no future but total annihilation for the Israel to which he speaks. They have refused to heed the chastisements of history and messages of his oracles, and they persist in idolatry and self-sufficient schemes. God himself will enforce the curses that their conduct invokes upon them.

I think that once again in verses 7-8 we are seeing God give the people exactly what they wanted.

They wanted to worship animals, and so God says fine - I will give you an animal, but it won't be a harmless calf. Instead, it will be a

lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast! And the animals I give you will kill you and eat you!

But what about the shepherd? Where is the shepherd when the flock needs protection from these terrible wild animals?

What shepherd? Do we mean that shepherd that the people forgot all about back in verse 6?

They didn't need any shepherd in verse 6 - and now they suddenly need a shepherd in verse 7? Oh, the irony!

Hosea 13:9

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

“**He** destroys you.” Who is **he**?

For starters, I think the ASV translation is better here - “**It** is thy destruction, O Israel.” But that translation changes our question only slightly - what is **it**?

The most natural answer is Assyria. And, as we have said, there may be a very subtle reference to Assyria with some wordplay in verse 7. In any event, we know that God would soon use Assyria to destroy Israel.

But it is also possible that verse 9 is taking a broader view of things. And perhaps that broader view is suggested by the four animals we saw in the previous two verses.

If so, then perhaps the destroyer in verse 9 is not Assyria, but is what was behind Assyria - the power of God and the wrath of God. Assyria was not pulling the strings here. As we see in Isaiah 7:18, Assyria showed up whenever God whistled for them.

Whether the “it” in verse 9 is Assyria or the wrath of God, the message is the same: Israel was going to be destroyed at God's command.

But why? Why was that going to happen? We have seen the answer to that question many times in this book, and we see it once again here in verse 9: “for you are against me, against your helper.”

God's people had turned against God. They had rejected God, they had forgotten God, and they had cast away the word of God. And so they were going to be destroyed. As God told them in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." They did not know God, and that lack of knowledge destroyed them. Yes - we can be destroyed by what we don't know!

And did that make God happy? Was God gleefully saying, "I told you so!" We have also seen the answer to that question many times in this book, and we see it once again here in verse 9 with that final phrase: "against your **helper**."

God was their helper. God was the only one who could help them, and God wanted to help them.

How do we know that? We know that because God sent Hosea to warn them. And God sent Amos to warn them. And God sent other prophets to warn them. We know God wanted to help them because God was the one pulling the fire alarm!

If God had wanted them to perish, then Hosea's phone would never have rung! God would never have called Hosea or sent Hosea to do anything!

But God did call Hosea. Why? Verse 9 tells us - God wanted to help them! God called Hosea to warn them because God was their helper.

But the people had turned against their helper. The people did not want God's help. And so they would soon be destroyed.

The people would soon perish in that fire even though God had warned them about that fire, had repeatedly offered to rescue them from that fire, and was at this very moment pulling the fire alarm through Hosea's message!

God had told them about the way to safety, but the people had ignored him. They didn't need God to save them! They could save themselves! And how did that turn out? It turned out the same way it always does when people think they can save themselves.

And again, that is a lesson they should have learned from the exodus.

Psalm 44:3 - For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

Hosea 13:10

10 Where now is your king, to save you in all your cities? Where are all your rulers-- those of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"?

There is a word for what we see here in verse 10 - it is a **taunt!** Where now is your king? Where are all your rulers?

There is a tendency today for people to believe, **despite all of the evidence to the contrary**, that if we can ever just get the right person into office, then all of our problems will be solved. I don't think that belief is just a modern phenomenon. I think we see that same attitude here in verse 10.

If God asks the people where their king is to save them, that tells us that the people must have been hoping that their king would save them, but he had not.

And while kings were not elected, they were raised to power - either by themselves or by others, often through assassination of the previous occupant of the throne.

And we know that the people were involved in that process - we see that right here in verse 10 where the people say, "Give me a king and princes!"

That phrase may point us all the way back to King Saul, but I think it more likely points back only so far as the people's attitude toward their current batch of evil cut-throat kings.

And each new king, no doubt, came to power with a promise to fix all of the problems. But the problems remained, and in fact, the problems got much worse.

And why did the problems remain? Why did the problems get much worse?

Because, while the people wanted to change their leaders, the people had no desire to change themselves. And, again, we may see a modern parallel in that.

So what is the point of verse 10?

The point of verse 10 is that no earthly ruler could possibly save the people from the coming Assyrian invasion. Only God could do that, and, in fact, God did that - but not with Israel. God did that with Judah as we saw earlier in Isaiah 37.

God would later turn the Assyrians back from Jerusalem, but God would not turn the Assyrians back from Samaria.

Hosea 13:11

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

In the ESV, the verbs in verse 11 are past tense - I gave and I took. And most translations also use the past tense, but one commentary says that “the grammatical forms [in verse 11] imply future tense.” And a few translations use a future tense or a present tense instead of a past tense.

- **[Young’s Literal Translation]** I **give** to thee a king in Mine anger, And I **take** away in My wrath.
- **[New American Bible]** I **give** you a king in my anger, and I **take** him away in my wrath.
- **[Latin Vulgate]** I **will give** thee a king in my wrath, and **will take** him away in my indignation.

If the past tense is correct, then which king did God give them in his anger?

Most likely that past king would be King Saul. The people asked for a king, and so God gave them one. And God later took that same king away when Saul was disobedient.

1 Samuel 8:6-7 - But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

And that interpretation may be correct. Verse 10 may be pointing back to King Saul ("Give me a king"), and verse 11 may also be pointing back to King Saul ("I gave you a king" and "I took him away").

But what if the correct tense is not the past tense?

In that case, I think what we see here in verse 11 is something we have already seen several times in Hosea - I think we see God punishing the people by giving them exactly what they want!

If so, who is the king that God would give them? And who is the king that God would take away from them? I think both of those questions are answered by a single verse.

2 Kings 17:4 - But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

The people wanted a king? Fine - God would send them the King of Assyria!

And what about their current king? God would take King Hoshea away!

Nothing in the Hebrew requires the king who is given to be the same king who is taken away.

So which view is correct? We can't say for sure, but I lean toward the second view - the people wanted a king, and so God would send them one - the King of Assyria!

That view fits very nicely with what we saw in verses 7-8, where we also saw God giving the people exactly what they wanted. They wanted to worship animals, so God said fine - I will give you an

animal, but it won't be a calf. Instead, it will be a lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast! And they will kill you and eat you!

And here in verse 11 the people wanted a king, so God says fine - I will send you a king - the King of Assyria!

We have seen it now so many times that perhaps we should call it a theme - sometimes the worst punishment from God is when God gives us exactly what we want!

Hosea 13:12

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

This is a difficult verse, and the commentaries differ greatly on its meaning.

Does verse 12 mean that Ephraim had been concealing its sin? I don't think so. Their worship of Baal had been done in public, and, in fact, they didn't think it was wrong - they would have seen no need to conceal it.

Does verse 12 mean that Ephraim had been treasuring their iniquity and carefully binding it up and storing it away? Again, I don't think so. They did not recognize any iniquity in their lives, so it's not clear how or why they would have been binding it and storing it.

Does verse 12 mean that God was keeping their sin bound up and stored away so that the punishment for that sin could occur at a later date? This option is better than the first two, but again it presents us with a very strange metaphor. Where and why is God storing sin?

The Hebrew verb in verse 12 translated "kept in store" is used elsewhere for concealing treasures, so some suggest that the word in verse 12 refers to the secure concealing of an important document on which God recorded Ephraim's sins so that they could be revealed at a later time as "a permanent and inescapable record of Ephraim's culpability."

So which is it? What is the point of verse 12?

I think it is helpful to look ahead to verse 13. In that verse, we will see childbirth, and verse 13 is linked to verse 12 by the pronouns that refer back to Ephraim.

That context of childbirth suggests that the sin bound up and stored in verse 12 may correspond to the unwise son we will see in verse 13.

If so, then the binding and storing in verse 12 may refer to the time between when that unwise son was conceived and when that unwise son was ready to be born.

I think the point in verse 12 is that, although Ephraim's sins may have started long ago and may have occurred over a long period of time, the consequences of those sins would be felt all at once - like a childbirth. The child was stored for many months, but the birth would happen suddenly.

But why did the people need that message?

Hoses has now been prophesying about a coming disaster for 13 chapters, but perhaps the people were doubting his prophesies because nothing too terrible had happened so far. Perhaps the people had the same attitude that Peter would later describe:

2 Peter 3:4 - They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

If so, then verse 12 gives us Hosea's response - **it's coming!** Your sin has been building and building for many years now, but the punishment for that sin will certainly come, and, when it does, it will come quickly.

Hosea 13:13

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

The “him” in verse 13 is Ephraim from verse 12, and the message of verse 13 is that great pain was going to come upon Ephraim, like the agony of childbirth.

But, instead of pain that results in the great joy of a baby, this pain would lead only to more anguish because the child would never be born.

In fact, both the mother and the child would die because verse 13 is describing a breech delivery, and such an event in Hosea’s day would have resulted in the death of both the mother and the child.

Who is the unwise son in verse 13?

It may be Ephraim, and, if so, we have a mixed metaphor in which Ephraim is both the mother and the child.

But that sort of mixture should not surprise us because we have already seen that same mixed metaphor in this book.

On one hand, Ephraim corresponds to faithless Gomer, the wife of Hosea. But on the other hand, Ephraim also corresponds to Jezreel, Not Loved, and Not Mine, the three children of Gomer.

And, as we said earlier, Ephraim as a wife may correspond to the leadership and institutions of Ephraim, while Ephraim as a child may correspond to the ordinary people of Ephraim who had been led astray by that leadership and by those institutions.

But it is also possible that the “unwise son” in verse 13 is simply the child who, in a sense, refuses to be born and so is called “unwise.”

Some commentaries suggest that the phrase “unwise son” was “a technical term in Israelite midwifery for a fetus that was not properly turned or in some other sense was not ready for birth.”

And I don’t think we have to choose between those two options.

Hosea may have taken a technical term for a breech birth and used that term to describe the people of Ephraim in the same way - as an unwise son. And that unwise son, the people of Ephraim, would die along with his mother, the leadership and the institutions of Ephraim.

Hosea 13:14

14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

Verse 14 is truly one of the very greatest verses in the Bible, and our first question about verse 14 is whether it opens with two questions or with two declarations.

In the ESV it opens with two questions, but the ESV is not the only possible translation.

- **[ASV] I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death:** O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction? repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.
- **[KJV] I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death:** O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

Those translations have quite a different message from what we see in the ESV!

If verse 14 opens with two questions, then it is not clear whether God will actually ransom his people from death. God may be thinking about doing it, but verse 14 doesn't tell us what he plans to do. "Will I ransom them? Will I redeem them?"

But if verse 14 opens with two declarations, then what we see here is God's determination to save Israel. "I will ransom them. I will redeem them."

So which is it?

On one hand, some might say that a sudden declaration of deliverance is out of place in this terrible chapter of death. They might say that verse 14 is instead a taunt against the people: Do you really think I would ransom you? Do you really think I would redeem you? Think again!

If that view is correct, then the second half of verse 14 is simply a divine summons for death to come and do what death does best - kill people!

Under that view, we could paraphrase 14 this way: “Do you really think I am going to save you? If so, you are badly mistaken. I’m not coming, but let me tell you who is coming - death! Come on death! Bring your plagues and bring your sting!”

And if all we had was Chapter 13, then that view might be correct. It does fit well with the immediate context of verse 14, which is death.

But Chapter 13 is not all that we have to help us in understanding verse 14 - we also have the New Testament. We have what is personally my favorite verses in my favorite chapter in the entire Bible!

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 - I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” **“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Yes, Paul quotes Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55. But what are we to do with that quote?

The modern liberal scholar tells us that we are to do nothing with that quote.

They tell us that nothing written in the New Testament should ever be used to interpret a verse in the Old Testament. Instead, they say, we should interpret those Old Testament verses using only what the people knew at the time when those verses were written.

But that view is as wrong as anything can be!

The same Holy Spirit that gave us Hosea 13:14 also gave us 1 Corinthians 15:55, and if we interpret Hosea in a way that contradicts 1 Corinthians 15 then we can be absolutely certain that our interpretation is wrong. We must consider the entire word of God each time we interpret any verse found anywhere in the Bible.

So, when we do that, what do we discover about verse 14?

What we discover is that Paul's use of verse 14 in 1 Corinthians 15 answers our questions about how we should interpret that verse. Verse 14 is, in fact, a sudden promise of deliverance even if that might seem out of place to some in this context.

But is that criticism legitimate? Is it out of place? I don't think so.

In fact, we have already seen sudden promises of deliverance in this book.

Do we remember Hosea 1:10?

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

And do we remember Hosea 2:23?

And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

And how about Hosea 6:3?

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

We have seen many sudden promises of deliverance in this book, and I think we see the same thing here in verse 14.

When we interpret verse 14 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15, what we discover is that, yes, there is a taunt in verse 14 - but that taunt is **not** directed at Israel. That taunt is instead directed at death.

I think what God is saying in verse 14 is this: “Yes, death, you are having quite the day in this chapter of death! But, death, don’t think for a moment that you will win! Don’t think for a moment that you will have the last word! I have a plan that will defeat you forever! I have a plan that will offer redemption to Ephraim and to everyone else in the world!”

Lesson 45

Hosea 13:14 (Continued)

14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

As we said last week, verse 14 is one of the great texts of the Bible.

And, as we also saw last week, we cannot understand Hosea 13:14 without considering how Paul used that same verse in 1 Corinthians 15.

And when we consider 1 Corinthians 15, what we discover is that verse 14 is in fact a sudden declaration of deliverance, even though to some that might seem unexpected in this chapter of death.

But while some might say that a declaration of deliverance is out of place here, we know that it is not out of place at all. Why not? Because we have already seen such promises of deliverance several times earlier in this book.

Rather than being surprised by finding verse 14 in Hosea 13, I think the real surprise would have been if Hosea 13 did not include verse 14. I think after studying Hosea this far, we would have been shocked if God could give the people these terrible pronouncements of death without also letting them see a small ray of sunshine for what lay in store for their descendants - despite what these people had done in rejecting God and looking to Baal for their salvation.

For those reasons, I think the ASV translation of verse 14 is much better than the ESV.

I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; **I will redeem them** from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction? repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

The opening sentences are **declarations** (as in the ASV). They are not questions (as in the ESV). God **will** ransom them. God **will** redeem them.

And how do we know that? We know that because we have 1 Corinthians 15. God is taunting death in verse 14; he is not taunting the people.

Yes, God was about to send a terrible punishment against Israel because of their idolatry and their disobedience, and yes, that was what God had told them would happen back in Deuteronomy 28. But God still had a plan to bless the entire world through the Messiah, and there would be descendants of these people who would one day enjoy those great blessings in Christ. We meet such a person in John 4.

Here is how one commentary describes verse 14:

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about death and resurrection, he quoted from this thirteenth chapter of Hosea. ... The two questions from Hosea 13:14 are placed at the climax of Paul's discussion of death and resurrection. In this new context they are not commands, but victory cries: "O death, where is thy victory?" (Nowhere! Death itself has been defeated.) "O death, where is thy sting?" (Nowhere! It has been taken away.)

Although both Hosea 13 and 1 Corinthians 15 deal with the theme of death and are linked to one another with this quotation, it would be difficult to find two more contrasting presentations. ... The next-to-the-last chapter of Hosea ends with the sounds of defeat and dying, a mother weeping for an unborn child; the next-to-the-last chapter of First Corinthians concludes with the sound of the trumpet, announcing victory and resurrection through Jesus Christ.

What accounts for this total change from defeat to victory, from disaster to good news? The answer is what God has done through Christ.

The sayings of the prophet in Hosea 13 reek with the stench of death. The sermon of the apostle rings with the sound of the trumpet, calling all who hear to give thanks to the God who has given the victory through Jesus Christ.

Yes, Hosea 13 is a chapter of death, but verse 14 is where the blood of Christ meets that terrible chapter of death. And, as Jesus does with whatever he touches, Jesus transforms this chapter of death and despair into a chapter of life and hope.

And hasn't Jesus done that for each of us as well? Haven't we also gone from death and despair to life and hope through the power of Christ?

Those liberal scholars who ignore the New Testament when they study the Old Testament are missing a great deal! We **cannot** understand the Old Testament apart from the New Testament, and we should never try to do so.

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

Hosea may not have known it. His listeners may not have known it. Angels may not have known it. But God knew it. It was God's great plan of redemption, and God was announcing that great plan through the prophets and bringing it to pass through the Messiah.

That is the wonderful message of verse 14, and perhaps we might wish that verse 14 had ended with that wonderful message, but verse 14 is not over.

There is one final phrase at the end of verse 14 that is **not** quoted by Paul: “Compassion is hidden from my eyes.” What does that mean?

The first half of verse 14 took the people to a **future** time when the Messiah would come and bless the entire world.

The second half of verse 14 takes the people back from that glorious future to their **present** time when God is sending the Assyrians to punish them for their idolatry.

In this one verse we see both the great **punishment** that lay in store for Israel with the coming of **Assyria** and the great **blessing** that lay in store for Israel with the coming of **Christ**. Assyria would come in Hosea’s day, but the Messiah would not come for seven more centuries.

But Jesus was coming. And, when he came, the entire world would be blessed by his perfect sacrifice.

And, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, we see the wonderful gospel of Christ right here in Hosea 13:

“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hosea 13:15

15 Though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.

“Though he may flourish among his brothers.”

Once again we have a phrase with some translation issues. Here are some of the possibilities, starting with the one we just read:

- [ESV] “Though he may flourish among his brothers.”
- [KJV] “Though he be **fruitful** among his brethren.”

- [RSV] “Though he may flourish as the **reed plant**.”
- [NRSV] “Although he may flourish **among rushes**.”

So which is correct?

If “brothers” is the correct translation, then the verse is telling us that Ephraim flourished among the other tribes.

But there is a problem with that view - the other tribes (except for Manasseh) were **not** Ephraim’s brothers but rather were Ephraim’s uncles. Ephraim’s father, Joseph, was their brother, but Ephraim was their nephew. But, the word “brother” may be used here in the broader sense of “kinsman.”

But another potential problem with this this view is that Hoses hasn’t really been focused on the other tribes, which is understandable given the fact that Ephraim was the only tribe that was left in the north.

So, for those reasons, I tend to favor either the RSV (“he may flourish as the **reed plant**”) or the NRSV (“he may flourish among **rushes**”).

But we still have to figure out what that means.

The word “rushes” in the Bible can refer to plants, but can also refer more generally to wetland areas in which cattle and sheep can thrive. We see that usage for example in Genesis 41.

Genesis 41:18 - Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in **the reed grass**.

And any time we find a reference to the exodus in Hosea we need to sit up and take notice.

Here the reference would not be to the **end** of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt under Moses, but rather to the **beginning** under Joseph. But even so, I think we can say that the text may have the exodus in mind here with this reference to the rushes or the reed plant.

And this view fits well with the immediate context. What did we see in verse 5?

Hosea 13:5 - It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.

God had taken care of Israel in the wilderness like a well-fed flock of sheep protected from drought. But that protection had caused them to forget about God.

And now? Now God again pictures them as well-fed flock, but God will strike them with drought rather than protect them. That is what the next phrase in verse 15 tells us - **“the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up; his spring shall be parched.”**

And again, I think we see a reference back to Joseph in Genesis 41. At that time, Israel had fled to Egypt because of a drought - and God had protected them there. And now the people would once again turn to Egypt during a time of drought, but God would not protect them. Instead, God would send an east wind - the Assyrians - to punish them.

And so here at the end of Hosea we are reminded of a verse that we saw at the beginning of Hosea.

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

God was going to turn their land into a desert.

That reference to the east wind in verse 15 is interesting. Why? Because during the exodus God sent an east wind, not to punish them, but to save them. And God dried up the waters, not to punish them, but to save them.

Exodus 14:21 - Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong **east wind** all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

God's method of salvation in Exodus 14 has now become a method of punishment in Hosea 13.

What about that final phrase in verse 15 - **“it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing”**?

Back in verse 12 we were told that the sin of the people had been stored up. They had been sinning for a long time, but the consequences of that sin would come quickly.

Here at the end of verse 15 (which I think points back to verse 12), what we see is that people had been storing something else as well - they had been storing and concealing their wealth so that they could escape with it to Egypt. Earlier, they had plundered the Egyptians and left with their wealth, but now they were gathering up their wealth and heading back to Egypt.

But they would lose all of that wealth. The Assyrians would find it, and the Assyrians would plunder it.

Why? Because the people were not just storing their wealth (verse 15). They were also storing their sin (verse 12).

Before we leave verse 15, we should note that there **may** be a lot of wordplay going on here in the original Hebrew - at least some commentaries claim that there is.

One commentary even says that Hosea “has adapted a noun to criticize Ephraim [which means doubly-fruitful] with a pun on a pun” by which the Hebrew word for “fruitful” is very close to the Hebrew word for “wild ass.” **Maybe**. But when we start looking for Hebrew puns on Hebrew puns, I think it is probably time for us to move on to the next verse. (Maybe past time!)

Hosea 13:16

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

Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom, just as Jerusalem was the capital city of the southern kingdom. Hosea never mentions Jerusalem by name, but he mentions Samaria by name six times, with this mention being his last.

That presents a question for us - **why so few?**

Isaiah mentions Jerusalem 47 times, and Jeremiah mentions Jerusalem 99 times. Why do we see only six mentions of Samaria in Hosea?

Most likely it is because there was very little difference at this time between Ephraim and Samaria and so the tribe and the city were almost synonyms. Even today we sometimes use a capital city to denote the entire government or even the entire country.

But, for whatever reason, it is interesting that most of the preaching in Hosea is directed to the **tribe** (Ephraim) rather than the **capital city** (Samaria), while most of the preaching in Isaiah is directed to the **capital city** (Jerusalem) rather than the **tribe** (Judah).

“Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God.”

Samaria shall bear her guilt. The KJV translation is: “Samaria shall become **desolate**.”

That translation in the KJV reminds us of another event. That word “desolate” makes us think of what Jesus would later say, not about Samaria, but about Jerusalem.

Matthew 23:37-39 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you **desolate**.

Jesus was telling his disciples that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Romans as a punishment for her rebellion.

Was Jesus happy about that? We know he was not. We know how Jesus felt about that event: “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Likewise, Samaria would soon be destroyed by the Assyrians as a punishment for her rebellion. Was God happy about that? We know he was not. We have seen God’s sadness about Ephraim all throughout this book of Hosea.

But happy or not, Samaria would bear her guilt by the Assyrians in 722 BC, just as Jerusalem would later bear her guilt - first by the Babylonians in 586 BC and then by the Romans in AD 70.

And what did they all have in common? They had each been the people of God. But they had disobeyed God; they had rejected God; they had turned their back on God. Each had rebelled against God, as verse 16 tells us about Samaria. And so God punished them. Their house was left desolate.

The Handout for Lesson 45 lists some other similarities between the fall of Samaria under Assyria and the two later falls of Jerusalem under Babylon and Rome.

The Jews in Jerusalem should not have been surprised by what happened to them in AD 70. The same thing had happened twice before to the Jews for the same reason.

The Hebrew word translated “rebelled” is used only here in Hosea. In fact, this is the only place in the Minor Prophets where that Hebrew word is found.

But we do see that Hebrew word used in Deuteronomy to describe the people of the exodus and to describe a rebellious child - both of which fit very nicely with our context here.

Deuteronomy 9:7 - Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been **rebellious** against the LORD.

Deuteronomy 21:20 - And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and **rebellious**; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’

Verse 16 ends with a particularly gruesome and brutal description of what lay in store for Samaria: **“they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.”**

These horrible punishments are what typically happened in ancient times when a city resisted its takeover by a stronger power. By inflicting such horrors, the stronger power would encourage the next city to peacefully open their gates.

But are these horrors part of the punishment from God? Dashing babies in pieces and ripping open pregnant women?

I think we have to conclude **yes**, at least in a sense. God was most certainly sending Assyria to conquer Ephraim, and these actions were most certainly what Assyria typically did when a city resisted their invasion.

But there are some caveats to that conclusion.

First, Samaria could have opened their gates to the Assyrians, thereby avoiding these horrible punishments.

Second, if Assyria went too far in punishing Ephraim, then God would hold Assyria accountable for those excesses. That is what God did with Babylon.

Isaiah 47:6 - ...I gave them into your hand; you showed them no mercy...

And we know that God later punished Assyria by striking its own capital city, Nineveh.

Nahum 3:5-7 - Behold, I am against you, declares the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, "Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her?"

And third, even if Assyria had not gone too far, even that would not mean that Assyria would escape punishment.

It is a common misconception about prophecy to argue that if I am prophesied by God to do some action, then God cannot punish me for that action. We sometimes hear that argument, for example, about Judas betraying Christ or about Peter denying Christ. That somehow they are less culpable because what they did had been prophesied to happen. But that is **not** what we find in the Bible.

In fact, when we turn to Romans 9, we find the Jews making that same argument to God - you used what we did to bless the world, so how can you punish us for something that we were prophesied to do and that you used to bless the world?

Romans 9:19 - You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

And God’s answer? We see it in the next verse.

Romans 9:20 - But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

Just because God knew someone was going to commit some evil action and then used that evil action to accomplish something good or to further his plans does not mean that person is not fully responsible for that evil action.

We are responsible for what we do even if what we do was prophesied and even if God somehow uses what we do to further his plans. That was true of Assyria, that was true of Babylon, that was true of the faithless Jews, and we could point to many other examples.

And so verse 16 gives us a terribly brutal description of what was coming for the city of Samaria.

What specifically happened to that city? We find that answer in 2 Kings 17 - Samaria suffered a three year siege.

2 Kings 17:5-6 - Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Amos also describes that exile in which people were carried away with hooks.

Amos 4:2-3 - “The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon,” declares the LORD.

Very often, those people in a besieged city would resort to cannibalism. We see that with an earlier siege of Samaria by Syria.

2 Kings 6:24 - Afterward Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.

2 Kings 6:28-29 - And the king asked her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him.' But she has hidden her son."

And, as bad as that siege was at the hands of Syria, we can be sure that the three year siege by Assyria was much worse. For starters, God miraculously rescued the city from Syria in 2 Kings 7:6-7, but God did not do that with Assyria.

And so with verse 16 we come to the end of Hosea 13, this terrible chapter of death.

This chapter includes some of the most brutal language in the Bible, and it was all coming for Ephraim - a people who had once been the people of God, a people who had been greatly blessed by God, and a people bearing the name of Ephraim, who was Jacob's grandson and Joseph's son.

And, for that blessed and exalted people, the final words of this chapter are these: "their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open."

What can we say about that?

One thing we can say is that, absent Christ, those would have been the last words in the book of Hosea - and they would have been the last words in our own history as well.

If it weren't for Jesus, the ending of Hosea 13 would be our ending as well - all we would have to look forward to would be hopelessness and death.

We should all thank God that the book of Hosea doesn't end with verse 16!

Let's look now at how the book of Hosea does end.

Hosea 14:1

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Having almost finished our study of Hosea, we have by now become quite used to seeing abrupt changes in topic and tone, but the change in topic and tone between the end of Hosea 13 and the beginning of Hosea 14 still comes as a shock. Let's read the end of Hosea 13 and the beginning of Hosea 14 together:

“Their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled...”

As one commentary describes the first verse of Chapter 14:

“It is a jarring call, but also a relief, to set beside the somber account of destruction with which Chapter 13 ended.”

Yes, verse 1 is a relief. The end of Chapter 13 seemed so final, and yet it was not the final word. We also have Chapter 14, and yet again God is calling upon the people to repent and to return to him.

We have a big question right at the beginning of this final chapter of Hosea - when was it written?

Is this chapter a final call for the people of Hosea's day to repent so that they can avoid their coming invasion, destruction, and exile at the hands of the Assyrians? Or is this final chapter something else? I think this final chapter is something else.

Yes, we have seen promises of restoration and deliverance in this book - but those promises have all looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come to bless the entire world, including Israel.

Those promises have not looked to a restoration of these people listening to Hosea who had forgotten God and gone after Baal, but rather to their descendants who one day would see the promised Messiah with their own eyes.

So we have some questions - when was this final chapter written? And to whom was it written? And where was Hosea when it was written?

Why do I ask where Hosea was? Because we have to wonder what happened to Hosea when Assyria invaded. Was Hosea killed? Was Hosea carried off into exile?

Of course, we don't know for sure, but we have seen Hosea's interest in Judah off and on throughout the book starting with the very first verse of the book where Hosea named four Judaeen kings.

In my opinion, Hosea escaped to Judah before the Assyrians showed up.

And, if so, we have yet another comparison between the destruction of Samaria and the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus warned his followers in the three gospel accounts written prior to AD 70 (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) to flee the city of Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans, and Jesus gave them the warning signs to let them know when they needed to run.

Did Hosea have warning signs? We know that he did because he has been relaying those warnings from God to his listeners. We have seen Assyria get closer and closer to Samaria as we have move closer and closer to the end of the book. Hosea knew better than anyone that Assyria was coming soon.

I think Hosea escaped the fall of Samaria just like Jesus' followers later escaped the fall of Jerusalem. They were warned, and they fled in time to escape the onslaught.

And if that is correct, then perhaps Hosea penned this final chapter from his new home in Judah after his escape from Ephraim, after Samaria fell, and after the people of Israel were killed or exiled.

If that is correct, then who is Hosea talking to here in Hosea 14?

I think Hosea is talking to the **descendants** of those who refused to listen to him before the fall of Samaria. I think this final chapter is Hosea's message to the **Samaritans** - those descendants of Israel who would one day have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel of Christ.

And how would that happen?

Verse 1 answers that question - the people would have to return to God.

Lesson 46

Last week we started looking at the first verse of Hosea 14, and the first thing we noticed about it is that it has an abrupt change in tone from the horrors that we saw in the final verse of Hosea 13.

And we also considered when and where Hosea 14 was written. A likely possibility is that it was written in Judah after Hosea had fled there to escape the Assyrian invasion.

If so, then Hosea 14 was likely written after the fall of Samaria, which means that the promises in this chapter were not for the people of Hosea's day, but for their descendants who would later see and hear the Messiah.

But that is not a surprise. Why not? Because the other promises of deliverance we have seen in this book have pointed to the deliverance and salvation that would come from the Messiah.

Hosea 14:1 (Continued)

1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

The command in verse 1 is to return to God, and Hosea had earlier told us that the people would, in fact, return when the Messiah came.

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

And we see an example of that return in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well.

John 4:41-42 - And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

The Savior of **Israel**? The Savior of **Ephraim**? No - the Savior of the **world**! These promised blessings were for Israel, but they were not only for Israel. They were blessings promised to the entire world, of which Israel was a part.

And, yes, the people had stumbled because of their iniquity, and yes, the people had been punished because of their iniquity. But the door remained open for their descendants - for their children.

And to those who look at the final verse in Hosea 13 and complain that God was not caring for those children, the ones who did not care for the children in Hosea 13 were their parents, who led their children into that terrible situation despite countless warnings from God!

Did God care for their children? Hosea 14 is written to their children. These promises are directed to their descendants.

The relationship that had been lost between God and the parents would later be restored between God and their children. But those children needed to return. They needed to repent.

Hosea 14 places that condition first here in Hosea 14, and Peter did the same thing in Acts 2.

Acts 2:38 - And Peter said to them, “**Repent** and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Before we can walk with God, we must turn away from this world. We must return. We must repent. I think those who have the most trouble living the Christian life are those who have the most trouble with this step - they have never fully turned to God and fully away from this world.

And why was Ephraim in need of repentance? Verse 1 answers that question: “for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.” That’s the same reason that we are all in need of repentance.

We have seen that word “stumble” frequently in this book. In fact, if you look down the page a bit you will see that the book of Hosea ends with that word: “but transgressors **stumble** in them.”

One commentary defines that word “stumble” this way:

“The term ‘stumble’ describes falling into disgrace and defeat as a result of immoral or foolish behavior.”

And, yes, we stumble, and yes, we fall. But that stumbling need not be the end of our story. Instead, we can return to God. That is the great promise of Hosea 14, and it is the great promise of the gospel.

We see that in Acts 2, and we also see it in Acts 3, where once again, as in Acts 2 and as in Hosea 14, the command begins with “repent!”

Acts 3:19-21 - Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Hosea 14:2-3

2 Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

“Take with you words and return to the LORD.”

Again, we see the command to return, but here was also see something else: a command to “take with you words.”

What does that mean? What words?

I think verses 2-3 answer that question. How? Because they give us the actual words that the people are told to use. Hosea is not just telling the people to return to God, but Hosea is also telling them what to say when they do that.

And, of course, we know that Hosea is not just telling them to **recite** these words - Hosea is telling them to **mean** these words. That is why we also see the word "return" in verse 2. If the people just recited these words as some sort of an empty formula, then it could never be said that they had returned to God. In fact, as we have seen, they had been saying the right words all along, but they had been empty words said as part of their empty worship.

"Take with you words!"

We must never doubt the importance of words. The promised Messiah was called the word made flesh in John 1:14. God has always communicated with mankind using words. God was speaking words to Adam from the moment he created him (Genesis 1:27-28). And God speaks to us with words.

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

We live in a day and age in which the written word is losing its importance. If our cell phones teach us anything it is this: images are more important than words. We exalt images, and we skim words.

And we see that same attitude in a religious world that exalts feelings over words. They ignore the written word because they feel they are being led by the spirit to do whatever it is they are doing. And surprise! That spirit that is leading them always agrees with what they want to do! But that fact, of course, alerts us at once to the real identity of the spirit that is leading them - it is their own spirit!

Yes, we are led and guided by the Holy Spirit, but that leading and that guiding are accomplished through the **words** that the Holy Spirit has given us. The **words**! As we read in verse 2: "take with you **words**!"

If we want to trace the origin of most religious error in the world today, I think we should start with the false notion that the Spirit of God is somehow guiding us and nudging us today in some way apart from the word of God.

I like what Franklin Camp wrote about this issue in the introduction of his book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption*:

The subject of the Holy Spirit is one that I have been interested in from the time that I started preaching. One of the first errors that I had to meet when I began preaching was the denominational claim that the Holy Spirit worked directly and apart from the Word of truth. **This is one of the basic doctrines of the denominational world.** The teaching that the Spirit works directly and apart from the truth strikes at the very foundation of the authority of the Scriptures. This doctrine opens the door for the claims of all false teachers from Joseph Smith and Oral Roberts to Billy Graham. If one is led directly by the Spirit apart from the truth, then he does not need the Bible, nor indeed can he be expected to follow the Bible.

And I also like what the Apostle John wrote on this issue!

1 John 4:6 - We are from God. Whoever knows God **listens to us**; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. **By this we know** the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

“Whoever knows God listens to us.” And to what do we listen? We listen to **words**. And what do those **words** allow us to do? “**By this** we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

There are countless people today being led by the spirit of **error** because they have refused to **listen** to the **words** that we have from Spirit of **truth**.

Back to verse 2, what are the words that the people are told to say when they return to God?

“Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more,

‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

I think we can split these words into three parts: a plea for forgiveness, a renunciation of false faith, and an appeal for mercy.

Let’s start with the plea for forgiveness:

“Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”

The first step to asking God to forgive my sins is to admit that I have sinned.

So far, we have seen nothing to suggest that Ephraim was aware of its own sin. Instead, Ephraim has been trying to worship both God and Baal, with the false belief that God would be fine with that arrangement.

But, of course, God was not fine with that arrangement. The people were guilty of idolatry and faithlessness and disloyalty and ingratitude and on and on. As we saw in Hosea 13:2, “they sin more and more.”

But here they are told to say, “take away all iniquity.” Not only is that a plea for forgiveness, but it is an admission that there is iniquity that needs to be forgiven.

We have seen nothing to suggest that the people listening to Hosea would ever say such a thing. And so, perhaps, even with this opening phrase, we may have a clue that this final chapter is not addressed to those people.

We never see this attitude from the people in Hosea’s day, but we do see it later with their descendants who believed in Christ in John 4 and who obeyed the gospel in Acts 8.

What about the next phrase in this plea for forgiveness? “Accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.” What does that mean?

The “good” that God is asked to accept is most likely the words themselves - a plea for forgiveness that comes from a penitent heart.

These are the words of someone who has turned away from the things of Baal, who has recognized the great sin that he has done, and

who has turned to God for forgiveness and restoration. I think that penitent plea is the “good” that God is asked to accept.

And then we have a promise made to God: “we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.” What does that mean?

I think a verse in Hebrews 13 answers that question.

Hebrews 13:15 - Through him then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice** of praise to God, that is, the fruit of **lips** that acknowledge his name.

In that verse we find the same two things we see here in verse 2 - sacrifice (bulls) and the fruit of lips (the vows of our lips).

We have already seen what God thinks of sacrifices that are made without a changed heart.

Hosea 6:6 - For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

And so here, the people promise to offer up that which God desires - steadfast love and knowledge of God - what Hebrews calls “a sacrifice of praise to God.”

And how often does the writer of Hebrews tell us that we should offer up that sacrifice? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Yearly? No. **Continually**. “Let us **continually** offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”

But how can we continually offer up a sacrifice? Paul answers that question.

Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as **a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

A **living** sacrifice is something I offer while I am **living**, which means that I do it **continually** as Hebrews 13:15 tells us. It’s not something we turn off and on. We are a **living** sacrifice. We **continually** offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That attitude that we are commanded to have all the time in Hebrews 13 and Romans 12 is the same attitude that is promised to God here in verse 2. “We will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”

The next thing the people are told to speak is a renunciation of their false faith:

“Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands.”

Again we see things that Ephraim never said. We have not heard the people say anything like this in Hosea, and we know they never had this repentant attitude. How do we know that? We know it because we know that Assyria invaded and punished Ephraim at God’s command. That fact alone tells us that the people did not repent.

But here the command is to repent, to ask God for forgiveness, and to confess that salvation comes only from God.

The kingdoms of this world cannot save us (“Assyria shall not save us”), we cannot save ourselves (“we will not ride on horses”), and our false gods cannot save us (“we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands”). Only God can save us.

Did Ephraim ever say this to God? No. In fact, they looked for their salvation from each of these other sources.

They believed that Assyria and Egypt would save them. They believed that their kings and their own military power would save them. And they believed that Baal and their golden calves would save them. God was not even on their list!

And so, once again, I think we see evidence here that these words were not being spoken by Ephraim in Hosea’s day.

But what about their descendants? What about the woman at the well who listened to Jesus in John 4? What about all of the other Samaritans who heard her story and believed in Jesus in John 4? What about those Samaritans who heard and obeyed the gospel in Acts 8?

I think they all said these words to God. I think they all understood that only God could save them. I think they all knew that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

That understanding that only God can save us (as we are told in Acts 4) is the same understanding that we see here in verse 3. “Assyria

shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands."

And the final thing the people are told to speak is an appeal for mercy:

"In you the orphan finds mercy."

This phrase has two parts - a stated part and an unstated part. The stated part is that God shows mercy to orphans.

And we certainly know both how God feels about orphans and, by extension, how we should feel about orphans as well.

Psalm 68:5 - Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

James 1:27 - Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

But **why** are orphans mentioned at the end of verse 3?

The reason orphans are mentioned here in this final phrase is because this final phrase also has an **unstated** part. As we just saw, the stated part is that God shows mercy to orphans. And the unstated part? It is this: **I am an orphan!**

There is a reason that the person saying this to God is reminding God about his care for orphans! The person saying this prayer is an orphan himself!

Remember what we know about Ephraim. They were "Not Loved"! They were "Not Mine"!

Throughout the book of Hosea, we have seen Ephraim depicted both as a faithless wife and as a child of that faithless mother. And, as we have said, Ephraim as a wife or mother denotes the institutions and leaders of Ephraim, while Ephraim as a child of that faithless mother denotes the common people of Ephraim who had been raised and led astray by those institutions and leaders.

And now? Assyria has destroyed those institutions and killed those leaders. The people are motherless.

And who was their father? To whom had the wife run when she was faithless to God? Baal.

The people had rejected God as their father and had instead looked to Baal as their father. If Baal had become the **husband** of the faithless wife, then Baal had also become the **father** of her children.

And now? Baal had forsaken them. Baal had let them all down. Baal did not save them because Baal was unable to save them. Baal could not even save himself.

And what do we call these common people who had now lost their mother and their father? We call them **orphans**.

And, like most actual orphans of that day, they were now homeless, having been dragged away from their homes and scattered by Assyria.

That was true of the people of Hosea's day. But what about their descendants? They were still orphans. They had lost their identity, and they had lost their homeland. The Jews who had once been a part of their family now looked upon them as being worse than Gentiles. The Samaritans were orphans just as their parents had been left as orphans.

And so, when verse 3 says, "in you the orphan finds mercy," there is in those words a plea for mercy from the orphan who is saying those words. "You show mercy to orphans. **Please show mercy to this orphan!**"

So, let's now circle back to a question we asked about verse 1 - **when** was it written?

I think we have some more evidence to support what we said earlier about that question - that Hosea penned this final chapter **after** his escape to Judah, **after** Samaria fell, and **after** the people of Israel were killed or exiled.

And what is that additional evidence. We just saw it. **When** would these words have been said if they were said at all? Well, **when** did the people become orphans? They became orphans after Assyria carried them off.

Again, I think this final chapter is looking **back** at that event just as the first thirteen chapters looked **toward** that event.

I think the fall of Samaria happened between Hosea 13 and Hosea 14.

And what will happen when these orphans return to God? The book of Hosea has already told us.

Hosea 1:10 - Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

These orphans would become the children of the living God.

And when and where did that happen? Peter tells us.

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

And Paul tells us.

Romans 9:25 - As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

And John tells us.

1 John 3:1 - See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

These orphans quit being orphans when they obeyed the gospel of Christ. That is when God adopted them.

Galatians 4:4-5 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And that is also when God adopted us.

We, like the people here in Hosea 14 and like the publican in Luke 18, can only pray, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” And, like the Samaritans and the publicans who obeyed the gospel, we can find that mercy only at the cross of Christ.

But are we saved at the moment we say a prayer? No, we are not. We are saved at the moment we come up out of the watery grave of baptism. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 6. We are buried in that water as a dead person, and we are raised from that water a living person.

And, yes, I know that countless denominational preachers tell us that all we need to do is pray what they call the sinner’s prayer - but that is not what the Bible tells us.

1 Peter 3:21 - Baptism, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hosea 14:4

4 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

Where is the gospel in Hosea? We are looking at it!

Heal their apostasy? Love them freely? Turn my anger from them? Those are the same things that God does for us through the gospel of Christ.

In fact, we see all three of these things in the most famous verse in the Bible.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world (“**I will love them freely**”), that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish (“**my anger has turned from them**”) but have eternal life (“**I will heal their apostasy**”).

Perhaps the next time we attend a football game we should hold up a sign that says **Hosea 14:4!** This verse is the **John 3:16** of the Old Testament!

I think we now have conclusive evidence for what we have been saying all along - that the great blessings promised in this book were not blessings for the people of Hosea's day, but were instead blessings for their descendants who would some day hear and obey the gospel.

And those are the same blessings that are offered to the entire world. Those are the worldwide blessings that God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3 - "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

And **after** we are healed, **after** we are loved freely, and **after** God's anger is turned from us - **what then?** The book of Hosea closes with the wonderful answer to that question.

Lesson 47

Last week we looked at the first four verses of Hosea 14, and we saw how those four verses describe God's wonderful plan to bless the entire world. We described verse 4 as the John 3:16 of the Old Testament - "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them."

And after we are healed, after we are loved freely, and after God's anger is turned from us - what then? The book of Hosea closes with the wonderful answer to that question.

Hosea 14:5-6

5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; 6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

The focus here is Israel, and I think it is **physical** Israel.

Why? Because physical Israel has been the focus of Hosea all throughout this book. For that reason, I think we are looking here in Hosea 14 at the physical descendants of the people who were listening to Hosea.

But we are also looking at **spiritual** Israel - at the church. We are also looking at us.

Why? Because the blessings that lay in store for anyone from **physical** Israel who later heard and obeyed the gospel are the same blessings that lay in store for anyone who hears and obeys the gospel. And those who obey the gospel are added to the church, which is **spiritual** Israel (Galatians 6:16).

The focus here is on **physical** Israel because they are the people of Ephraim who were exiled and scattered by Assyria. The warnings in this book were directed **first** to physical Israel, and the blessings in this book were directed **first** to physical Israel.

But we today can also learn from those same warnings, and we today can also enjoy those same blessings. There is one gospel, and it is a gospel for all people.

Is there any difference between a **Jew** who obeys the gospel and a **Gentile** who obeys the gospel? And the answer is . . . yes! There is a difference.

But it is **not** a difference of what we must do to obey the gospel. And it is **not** a difference on what happens to us after we obey the gospel. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in the church.

Romans 10:12 - For there is **no distinction** between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

The difference between a Jew who obeys the gospel and a Gentile who obeys the gospel is not a difference about where they are going, but rather it is a difference about where they came from. That is what Paul tells us in Romans 9 and 11.

Romans 9:4-5 - They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

Romans 11:24 - For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Paul tells us that the Jews had great advantages that were not enjoyed by the Gentiles - "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, . . . the promises," and "the patriarchs."

Jesus was a Jew according to the flesh. The Jews were the “natural branches” that could “be grafted back into their own olive tree.”

But once that grafting has occurred, there is no longer any difference. Both Gentile and Jew become branches on the **same** tree.

Galatians 3:28 - There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And there is no difference in **how** that grafting occurs.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek**.

Romans 3:9 - What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

The gospel that was proclaimed **first** to the Jews in Acts 2 is the same gospel that was also proclaimed to the Gentiles in Acts 10.

Again, the difference between a Jew and a Gentile in the church is a difference only of where they came from - not a difference of where they are going or a difference of how they get there. There is one and only one church, there is one and only one Savior, and there is one and only one gospel.

Back to verses 5-6, these beautiful verses begin a description of the blessings we enjoy - both Jew and Gentile - in Christ. And we know that these blessings are blessings **in Christ** because of what we read in verse 4.

As we said, verse 4 tells us what God does for us in Christ, and verse 5 begins a description of the blessings we enjoy **after** God does those things for us. Let's look at each of those blessings.

“I will be like the dew to Israel.”

The people of Israel could not live without dew. It was the evening dew that watered the earth when that water was most needed during the summer. It was a calamity when the dew failed to come, and the lack of dew was sometimes a result of divine judgment.

Haggai 1:10 - Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.

God was the source of that morning dew, as God made clear in his questions to Job.

Job 38:28 - Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?

But the subject of verse 5 is not water. The subject of verse 5 is the blessings that would come to those from Israel who would later obey the Messiah. And, as we know, those same blessings would also be enjoyed by Gentiles.

And the first blessing that God mentions is that he will be like this dew. What does that mean?

How is God like dew? I think we have already answered that question!

As we just saw, dew is a gentle, mysterious, daily presence without which the people cannot live. That is what God is like. That is what the grace of God is like.

“He shall blossom like the lily.”

After receiving the grace of God like dew from heaven, the people of God will blossom like a beautiful lily.

Any time we see a prophecy in the Old Testament about the beauty of God’s people, we should be thinking about the church. Why? Because the church is beautiful!

How do we know that? Because that is how God sees the church. In Revelation 21, we find a description of “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb,” which is the church.

We are often told that Revelation 21 is describing something that we cannot see (heaven) with images that we can understand. But is that true? I don’t think so.

We know from the opening verses of that chapter that, whatever is being described, it is not heaven.

Revelation 21:2 - And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down out of heaven** from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21 is not describing a place - it is describing a people.

Rather than describing something we **cannot** see (heaven), I think Revelation 21 is describing something we **can** see (the church) but that we aren't seeing correctly. God is telling us that the church is beautiful! The poor persecuted church of the first century likely saw themselves differently - and so God was telling them what they looked like to him!

Revelation 21:18-19 - The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel.

And Paul also told us that.

Ephesians 5:27 - So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The people of God are beautiful!

What blessings have we seen so far? The faithful people of God would receive the grace of God like dew, and the faithful people of God would be beautiful like a lily. And the next blessing?

“He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out.”

The next blessing is that the people of God would be stable like a large tree with deep roots growing in all directions.

This blessing brings to mind the opening Psalm.

Psalm 1:1-3 - Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. **He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**

But why is Lebanon mentioned? We know that Lebanon is famous for its cedar trees (as we see on the handout for Lesson 47), but let's save that question for later because we are going to see Lebanon again in these final verses.

Instead, let's look now at the next blessing.

“His beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.”

Again, we are reminded of a Psalm.

Psalm 52:8 - But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

As with the lily, we again see the beauty of God's people. The world may not see us that way, but is there anything that the world sees correctly? We know that we are beautiful because we know that is how God sees us, and we know that God sees us as we really are.

But there is a difference between the beauty of the lily and the beauty of the olive tree. Unlike a lilly, olive trees are useful and expensive, providing food, fuel, and medicine.

The church is not just something beautiful to look at. The church is something beautiful that is costly and useful.

1 Peter 1:18-19 - Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, **but with the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Titus 2:14 - Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for **good works**.

And our fragrance is like Lebanon.

Earlier in Hosea 5:11-13 we saw filth, dry rot, and festering wounds. And we can imagine that putrid fragrance of decay.

But the faithful people of God smell nothing like that!

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 - But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the **fragrance** of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the **aroma** of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a **fragrance** from life to life.

But why is Lebanon mentioned again? Let's save that question for later.

The description of the blessings that we enjoy in Christ continues in verse 7.

Hosea 14:7

7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

“They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow.”

In the ESV, God is the tree, and Israel dwells in his shadow. And that translation is widely adopted because it fits well with what we see elsewhere in the Bible about God and about the people of God.

Isaiah 49:10 - They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

Psalm 121:5-6 - The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

But, while the ESV translation fits well with some **distant** verses, it does not fit as well with **nearby** verses. Why not? Because the ESV translation causes this metaphor in verse 7 to be different from the other botanical metaphors that we see in verses 5-7.

In verse 5, Israel is like a lily and like a tree with deep roots. In verse 6, Israel is like a growing tree and like an olive tree. Later in verse 7 Israel will be like grain and like a vine.

But, if the ESV is correct, then at the beginning of verse 7, God (rather than Israel) is like a tree casting its shadow.

But what if the ESV is not correct? Another possible translation of verse 7 is “those who dwell in his shade shall return” where “his shade” refers to **Israel’s** shade.

That translation fits better with the surrounding metaphors, but what does it mean? Who is dwelling in the shade of the faithful people of God - and what would it mean that they return?

What we may be seeing here are the Gentiles who would repent, obey the gospel, and be added to the church, the Israel of God. This metaphor would then be giving us the same ordering that Paul gave us in the book of Romans, which is the same ordering that we see occurring in the book of Acts.

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

And as for the church being a tree, that is one way that Jesus described his kingdom.

Luke 13:18-19 - He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

So which is it? Is God the tree or are God’s people the tree?

As we just saw, either view could be correct, but I favor the second view because it fits better with the immediate context.

“They shall flourish like the grain.”

Again we have a translation issue, and again the ESV’s choice is the most common choice - that Israel would flourish like grain. And if that is what it means then its meaning is self-explanatory.

But the Hebrew word translated “flourish” does not really mean flourish. Instead, the Hebrew word means to make something else live - to keep it alive or to make it alive.

A better translation may be: “they like grain shall sustain *people*,” where “people” is an unstated direct object of the verb “flourish” or “sustain.”

And who are these people who are sustained? Once again, this may be faithful Gentiles who would partake of the same spiritual blessings that were promised here to faithful Israelites.

If we are on the right track here, then the opening two phrases in verse 7 are both pointing to the blessings that the faithful Gentiles would enjoy. And how did those blessings come to the faithful Gentiles? They came through the faithful Jews.

As we recall from our study of Ezra, it was faithful Jews who returned to Jerusalem under Cyrus, who rebuilt the temple, and who restored the proper worship of God.

They also remained faithful during the Greek desecration that occurred between the Testaments. And, as a result, there were faithful Jews such as Mary and Joseph living in Palestine, ready to welcome Christ into the world.

The gospel was then proclaimed to the Jews first, and the word of the Lord went out first from Jerusalem. Faithful Gentiles owe a great debt to faithful Jews.

“They shall blossom like the vine.”

Again, faithful Israel is described as a plant - this time as a vine that gives joy to others with the fruit of that vine.

In each of the descriptions that we have seen so far in verse 7, faithful Israel is described as the agency by which God extends his mercy and grace to others.

Israel is a tree under which others can go for shade. Israel is grain by which others are sustained. And now Israel is a vine that brings joy to others.

I think what we are seeing here is what God told Abraham in Genesis 12:3 - “and **in you** all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Notice that phrase “in you.” Yes, it was God who blessed the world, but God did that through Abraham, through the Jewish race, through the Jewish Messiah.

But God was not planning to just **ble**ss Israel. God was also planning to **use** Israel, and God was using Israel to bless the entire world.

Faithless Israel in Hosea’s day had threatened that plan by forgetting about God and turning to false gods. And for that reason, God had given them up, declaring that they were no longer his people. Instead, God would turn to Judah to bring about his great plan of redemption. If God could not use Israel, then God would use someone else.

“Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.”

I don’t like the ESV translation of “fame.” I think the Hebrew word is better translated as a “remembrance.”

Proverbs 10:7 - The **memory** of the righteous is a blessing...

The blessing is not that the faithful would be **famous**. The blessing is that they would be **remembered** - and that they would be remembered fondly. That, apparently, is how people remembered the wine of Lebanon - with fondness.

But who is doing the remembering here? Who is remembering the faithful Israelites with fondness? It is God.

All throughout the book of Hosea we have seen God remembering Israel’s past. Sometimes those recollections have been pleasant, but often those recollections have been painful.

We have often seen God’s recollection of Israel’s past used as a basis for condemning them in the present.

Hosea 9:10 - Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

But we have also seen God’s fond recollections of Israel’s past used a reason for showing them compassion.

Hosea 11:3-4, 8 - Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. . . . 8 . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

When correctly translated, the end of verse 7 is a beautiful capstone on all of the blessings that God promises here to faithful Israel. Once again, God would remember Israel's youth - but this time all of the memories would be fond memories. God would not remember their sin.

Jeremiah 31:34 - . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Before we leave verse 7 we need to answer a question that we have been kicking down the road since verse 5 - why is **Lebanon** mentioned here?

Lebanon is not mentioned anywhere in Hosea except here in verses 5-7 where it is suddenly mentioned three times.

- **Verse 5** - He shall take root like the trees of **Lebanon**.
- **Verse 6** - And his fragrance like **Lebanon**.
- **Verse 7** - Their [remembrance] shall be like the wine of **Lebanon**.

And these references to Lebanon almost seem a little forced. Why? Because, while we know that Lebanon was known for its trees, it is not as clear how Lebanon was known for its fragrance or for its wine.

So here is the question: **Why the sudden interest in Lebanon?**

As we see on the handout, Lebanon was located north of Galilee. It was famous for its trees and was the source of the wood that Solomon used to build the temple.

1 Kings 5:6 - Now therefore command that **cedars of Lebanon** be cut for me. And my servants will join your servants, and I will pay you for your servants such wages as you set, for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.”

But cedar was not the only thing that Lebanon exported to Israel - Lebanon also exported the cult of Baal.

1 Kings 16:31 - And as if it had been a light thing for him (King Ahab) to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him.

Sidon was a Phoenician city located on the Mediterranean coast within Lebanon, and so King Ethbaal of Sidon and his infamous daughter Jezebel were both from Lebanon.

It is interesting to think about how Jezebel personifies some of the key themes in the book of Hosea. She was a worshipper of Baal and the daughter of King Ethbaal. She was killed at the command of King Jehu who was chosen by God to destroy the house of King Ahab. And, as we know, Jezebel was an evil wife.

1 Kings 21:25 - There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.

And so, just in that one person Jezebel, we see Baal worship, we see Jehu (whom we saw earlier in Hosea 1:4), and we see an evil wife.

I think the reason why Lebanon is mentioned three times in these verses is that Lebanon was firmly associated with Baal and with Jezebel.

But why do we see the **trees** of Lebanon, the **fragrance** of Lebanon, and the **wine** of Lebanon? Because **faithless** Israel had viewed Baal as the source of these agricultural blessings. Israel (going at least all the way back to Jezebel) had seen Baal as the god of fertility, and they had thanked Baal for these blessings.

But that would all change. Faithful Israel would understand that the **trees** of Lebanon came, not from Baal, but from God. Faithful

Israel would understand that the **fragrance** of Lebanon came, not from Baal, but from God. Faithful Israel would understand that the **wine** of Lebanon came, not from Baal, but from God.

Not only was Baal of Sidon not the source of fertility in distant Israel, but Baal was not even the source of fertility in its own hometown area of Lebanon! Baal was not a source of fertility anywhere.

As one commentary describes it:

It is by God's grace that Israel, once a source only of grief to the mind of God, would lose the stench of Baal and become to him like the wine of Lebanon.

Hosea 14:8

8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

If Hosea had written only a single verse instead of writing an entire book, I think verse 8 would have been that single verse.

And if God had decided to say only one thing to Ephraim instead of all the many things that God has said in this book, I think that one thing might have been verse 8.

In a sense, verse 8 summarizes the entire book. "O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?"

The sadness of the book, the seeming frustration of God that we see in this book, and the foolishness of the people all shine through in that short question from God - "O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?"

That question conveys the sense that God is fed up talking about idols! God is fed up having to explain to these people why idols are worthless and powerless.

If they can't understand how ridiculous it is to build something with your own hands and then to fall down and worship that thing you yourself built, then how can they ever understand anything about anything!

We see that same concern in Isaiah:

Isaiah 44:14-20 - He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. **He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it.** Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. **No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”** He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?”

The beginning of verse 8 leaves us with the definite impression that God would love for the entire subject of idols to just be over and done with.

And, in fact, that eventually happened, at least with these graven images - but it did not happen with Israel. Instead, it happened with Judah.

This sort of overt idolatry was never the problem in Judah after the Babylonian exile that it had been prior to the exile. That was one lesson that Judah learned from their punishment, although Judah certainly learned it the hard way.

It is I who answer and look after you.

The idols don't answer anyone, and the idols don't look after anyone. Why not? Because those idols are mute and lifeless.

Jeremiah 10:5 - Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.

The idols don't answer the people or look after the people, but God does both of those things.

Psalm 38:15 - But for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

Psalm 63:7 - For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

And there **may** be some subtle wordplay going on in verse 8.

The Hebrew verb translated "look after" sounds in Hebrew like the word for **Assyria**, and it also sounds like the name of the false goddess **Asherah**. And the Hebrew verb translated "answer" sounds in Hebrew like the false Canaanite goddess **Anat**.

So some commentators suggest that verse 8 is, through this wordplay, making the point that it is God who answers them and looks after them rather than Assyria or these false gods.

But we can't say for sure whether any of that wordplay is going on here. This may just be a case in which the scholars are a bit too clever in coming up with some new ideas.

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

Earlier Israel was a tree, and God used that tree to bless the world, But here we see what we already know - God is the source of those blessings. Yes, God may use Israel to bless the world, but God is the one who is doing the blessing.

In Hosea's day, the evergreen cypress was a common symbol of fertility. And so, once again, God reminds the people that he is the true source of these blessings and not Baal or any other false god.

Even though the name Ephraim means doubly-fruitful, Ephraim's fruit does not come from Ephraim or from Baal. God says, "from me comes your fruit."

And that word "fruit" is God's final spoken word in this book to doubly-fruitful Ephraim!

Hosea 14:9

9 Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Verse 8 is God's final **spoken** word in the book of Hosea, but this verse from the pen of Hosea is God's final **written** word in the book.

But why did Hosea add this verse? I think it is because Hosea knew that this book would be hard to understand. Hosea knew that we would need to be wise and discerning to understand it.

And how did Hosea know that? He certainly knew it by inspiration, but I suspect Hosea also knew it because he had frequently seen the puzzled expressions on the faces of his listeners!

Remember, Hosea was trying to wake people up! And we will never wake anyone up by being dull! We will never wake anyone up by telling them things they already know and that they have already heard countless times before. Yes, there is a place for review, but if all we ever do is review, then no one will ever grow. Instead, they will just stagnate.

Here is how one commentary describes it:

“In this sense the words of Hosea are like the parables of Jesus. They both instruct and confuse; they both explain and disorient. They are not simply riddles, that is, word games that are interesting until the proper solutions are found and then can be laid aside like completed crossword puzzles. The meaning of the words is both on the surface and yet progressively beneath the surface. The interpretive task is a pilgrimage, the goal of which is ever more gloriously in view but never fully attained. The text invites the reader to a way of life; it is a path that leads to understanding and to God.”

And so, yes, Hosea is a difficult book, but it is difficult for a reason, and I think we see that reason right here in the final verse.

“For the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.”

Do we walk or do we stumble? That is our final question in the book, and (after 47 lessons) I think we are walking! I think we understand the book of Hosea!

Here is how one commentary ends its discussion of this book:

Hosea’s final message to us is this: “How do you read the words of this book? Do they enlighten or confound? Are they life or death? Your response describes not so much the state of my book as the state of your soul.”

Yes, the book is difficult, but the book can be understood by those who approach the book with the right heart. And that is true of every verse in the Bible!

Epilogue

That’s the end of our journey! Who knew we would be spending so much time with Hosea and Gomer and Not Loved and Not Mine and Jezreel!

It has been a wonderful blessing and honor to have this opportunity to teach this book of Hosea. And, yes, it took longer than many of us, including me, expected it to take. But, if our goal is to understand the book of Hosea, then I’m not sure what we could have left out. And if our goal is something other than to understand the book of Hosea, well, that would have been easy.

Hosea is very dense. Hosea is very difficult. And so we had to move slowly. We had to move carefully to understand it. Many times, a single verse in Hosea would correspond to an entire chapter in the book of Isaiah.

I’ve taught the book of Revelation four times, verse by verse. I’ve taught the book of Daniel three times, verse by verse, and I’ve taught the book of Zechariah twice, verse by verse. I have never taught a book as difficult as Hosea.

We’ve seen many wonderful themes in the book of Hosea. We’ve seen the love of God. We’ve seen the grace of God. We’ve seen the plan

of God. We've seen the judgment of God. We've seen the wrath of God.

And, we've seen the importance of knowledge. People are destroyed for lack of knowledge, God said in Hosea 4:6. And, as we saw, that knowledge is not just an academic knowledge, but it is a deep knowledge of God.

It's the same word describing the knowledge between a husband and wife, and we know that the overriding metaphor in this book is the relationship between God, the husband, and his people, the wife, and between Hosea, the husband, and Gomer, the wife.

What these people lacked is knowledge, a deep abiding knowledge of God. And that lack what was destroying them. They did not know God. They did not know the things of God, the ways of God, the word of God, the people of God, or the plan of God. They did not know the love of God. They did not know God.

They knew about God. They were still going through all the motions. They were still keeping all the special feast days. We saw that.

But they had mixed in Baal worship, and they thought God would be fine with that. Who could possibly think such a thing? Only a people who did not know God. That's what they lacked, that knowledge of God. And if we take any message away from our study of Hosea, that needs to be the message we learn. We, the people of God, need to know God.

Thank you very much for your attention throughout all these studies of the book of Hosea. I plan to keep studying Hosea, and I hope you do as well. But next week, we start Joel!

Eric Hall (August 25, 2024)