

## HOSEA

### Introduction:

The Book of Hosea is one of the most passionate of the Minor Prophets. We can hardly read it without being gripped by the deep emotional and personal involvement of the prophet. The theme of Israel's indifference to God's love is translated in the experience of the prophet's own unhappy marriage. Leo Tolstoy opens his book *Anna Karenina* with the words: "All happy families are like one another; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Although we could construe these words to suggest that happy marriages are dull and excitement can only be found in marital unfaithfulness, we must admit that Hosea's marriage to Gomer perfectly fits Tolstoy's description. Hosea's unhappiness was unique in that it reflected God's heartache in His relationship with Israel.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes: "Scarcely any book in the Old Testament is more difficult of exposition than the Book of Hosea. This does not seem to be owing to any exceptional defect in the transmitted text, but rather to the peculiarity of the style; and partly also, no doubt, to the fact that the historical situation of the prophet was one of bewildering and sudden change of a violent kind, which seems to reflect itself in the book. The style here is preeminently the man. Whatever view we may take of his personal history, it is evident that he is deeply affected by the situation in which he is placed. He is controlled by his subject, instead of controlling it. It is his heart that speaks; he is not careful to concentrate his thoughts or to mark his transitions; the sentences fall from him like the sobs of a broken heart. Mournful as Jeremiah, he does not indulge in the pleasure of melancholy as that prophet seems to do. Jeremiah broods over his sorrow, nurses it, and tells us he is weeping. Hosea does not say he is weeping, but we hear it in his broken utterances. Instead of laying out his plaint in measured form, he ejaculates it in short, sharp sentences, as the stabs of his peoples sin pierce his heart. The result is the absence of that rhythmic flow and studied parallelism which are such common features of Hebrew oratory, and are often so helpful to the expositor. His imagery, while highly poetical, is not elaborated; his figures are not so much carried out as thrown out; nor does he dwell long on the same figure. His sentences are like utterances of an oracle, and he forgets himself in identifying himself with the God in whose name he speaks—a feature which is not without significance in its bearing on the question of his personal history."

### Time of Writing and Historical Background:

Bible scholars do not agree on the extent of Hosea's ministry. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* dates the beginning of Hosea's public life at 748 B.C. and Hezekiah's death at 690 B.C. *The Dictionary* observes that this "would make the prophets ministry extend over a period of about fifty-eight years. The book furnishes strong presumptive evidence in support of this chronology." *The Pulpit Commentary*, however, presents a different opinion: "When we examine the book itself for more precise indications of date, we find that the prophet threatens in God's name that in a little while He will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu. Now Jeroboam was the great-grandson of Jehu, and his son Zechariah, who succeeded him, reigned only six months and was the last of the line of Jehu. We may, therefore, place the beginning of Hosea's ministry a short time before the death of Jeroboam which took place 743 BC. As to the other limit, it is to be observed that, though the downfall of the kingdom of the house of Israel is threatened (Hos 1:4), the catastrophe had not occurred when the prophet ceased his ministry. The date of that event is fixed in the year 722 BC, and it is said to have happened in the 6th year of King Hezekiah. This does not give too long a time for Hosea's activity, and it leaves the accuracy of the superscription unchallenged, whoever may have written it. If it is the work of a later editor, it may be that Hosea's ministry ceased before the reign of Hezekiah, though he may have lived on into that king's reign. It should be added, however, that there seems to be no reference to another event which might have been expected to find an echo in the book, namely, the conspiracy in the reign of Ahaz (735 BC) by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus against the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 16:5; Isa 7:1). Briefly we may say that, though there is uncertainty as to the precise dates of the beginning and end of his activity, he began his work before the middle of the 8th century, and that he saw the rise and fall of several kings. He would thus be a younger contemporary of Amos whose activity seems to have been confined to the reign of Jeroboam."

Although Hosea mentions the names of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, it is generally supposed that his ministry pertained primarily to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. The Book of Second Kings records Jeroboam's reign as follows: "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of

Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher. The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash. As for the other events of Jeroboam's reign, all he did, and his military achievements, including how he recovered for Israel both Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Yaudi, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? Jeroboam rested with his fathers, the kings of Israel. And Zechariah his son succeeded him as king."

During the long reign of Jeroboam II, Israel subdued Damascus and recovered lost territory, restoring its boundaries to the extent the country knew during the reign of David and Solomon. Jeroboam's reign brought greater prosperity to the country than was known before (or after) but the affluence was laced with flagrant injustice and spiritual degeneration. The worship of YHWH under the images of the calves of Bethel and Dan, introduced by Jeroboam I, was practiced unabashedly. In instituting this mode of worship, Jeroboam I separated the service of YHWH from His revelation. Man no longer came to God on God's terms but on man's terms, while maintaining the form of true religion. Added to this, idolatry was widely practiced.

### Outline:

*The Nelsons Illustrated Bible Dictionary* gives the following outline of the book:

I.	The Adulterous Wife and Faithful Husband	1:1--3:5
	A. The Introduction to the Book of Hosea	1:1
	B. The Prophetic Marriage of Hosea to Gomer	1:2--2:1
	1. Hosea's Marriage to Gomer	1:2
	2. The Children of Hosea and Gomer	1:3-9
	3. The Application of Future Restoration	1:10--2:1
	C. The Application of the Adultery of Gomer	2:2-23
	1. Israel's Sin of Spiritual Adultery	2:2-5
	2. Judgment of God	2:6-13
	3. Restoration of Israel	2:14-23
	D. The Restoration of Gomer to Hosea	3
II.	The Adulterous Israel and Faithful Lord	4:1--14:9
	A. The Spiritual Adultery of Israel	4:1--6:3
	1. The Sins of Israel	4
	a. Rejection of the Knowledge of God	4:1-10
	b. Idolatry of Israel	4:11-19
	2. Judgment on Israel	5:1-14
	3. Eventual Restoration of Israel	5:15--6:3
	B. The Refusal of Israel to Repent of Its Adultery	6:4--8:14
	1. Willful Transgression of the Covenant	6:4-11
	2. Willful Refusal to Return to the Lord	7
	3. Willful Idolatry	8
	C. The Judgment of Israel by God	9:1--10:15
	1. Judgment of Dispersion	9:1-9
	2. Judgment of Barrenness	9:10-17
	3. Judgment of Destruction	10
	D. The Restoration of Israel to the Lord	11:1--14:9
	1. God's Love for Israel	11:1-11
	2. Israel's Continuing Sin	11:12--13:16
	3. God's Promise to Restore Israel	14

### The Text:

I.	<b>The Adulterous Wife and Faithful Husband</b>	<b>1:1--3:5</b>
	<b>A. The Introduction to the Book of Hosea</b>	<b>1:1</b>

**Ch. 1:1 – *The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:***

It is not clear whether this verse is part of Hosea's original text or a later addition by an editor of the book. In either case, the opening statement provides us with several spiritually rich lessons. The book begins with "The Word of the LORD." This reminds us of the beginning of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."<sup>1</sup> The Book of Hosea is "the Word of the LORD." In John's Gospel, that statement leads to the Incarnation. We find a hidden reference to the Incarnation in the name of this prophet. The name Hosea means: "help" and is probably an abbreviation of a name that can be rendered: "God is salvation." Moses' successor was called Hosea. We read that Moses changed his name to Joshua, or Yehoshua (YHWH saves), which is Hebrew for Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Although Hosea's ministry was probably limited to the Northern Kingdom, there is also a reference to the kings of Judah. The religion of the ten tribes of Israel was a manmade religion. It used the name of YHWH as a cover for carnal practices. As such it was worse and more corrupt than outright idol worship. In the reference to the kings of Judah there is an allusion to the theocracy the nation of Israel was meant to be.

As mentioned above, the reign of Jeroboam II was marked by affluence. Jeroboam's extended reign provided a stability the country had not known previously. Hosea's condemnatory message, therefore, must have met with little or no response. *Barnes Notes* observes: "Temporal prosperity is no proof either of stability or of the favor of God. Where the law of God is observed, there, even amid the pressure of outward calamity, is the assurance of ultimate prosperity. Where God is disobeyed, there is the pledge of coming destruction. The seasons when men feel most secure against future chastisement, are often the preludes of the most signal revolutions." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds: "Since Israel was most flourishing externally under Jeroboam II, who recovered the possessions seized on by Syria under Hazael, Hosea's prophecy of its downfall at that time was the more striking, the less it could have been foreseen by mere human sagacity. God alone could utter such a voice of thunder out of the midst of such a cloudless sky."

The prophet Jonah had revealed that Israel's relative ease was the fruit of God's compassion for Israel.<sup>3</sup> Hosea's other contemporary, Amos, pronounced his blistering condemnation of Israel's lack of response to the mercies of the Lord.

**B. The Prophetic Marriage of Hosea to Gomer 1:2--2:1**

**1. Hosea's Marriage to Gomer 1:2**

***Vs. 2 – When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."***

The rather strange construction of the first words of vs. 2 provides another link with the Prologue of John's Gospel: "In the beginning." The first word in Hebrew is *techillah*, which literally means "opening." God did not merely speak to Hosea but He made an opening in the prophet's life to speak "in" him, or through him. This speaking took the form of an action in which the Word of God was embodied: God told Hosea to marry Gomer.

I believe I married the woman God wanted me to marry. It is good to marry in the will of the Lord; it is the best guarantee of marital bliss. It seems, however, that Hosea's experience is an exception to this rule. The fact that God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute has, throughout the ages, given rise to conflicting opinions among scholars. It is obvious that God does not condone adultery or prostitution. The Creator of our sexual life has ordained that sex be practiced within the bonds of holy matrimony. God's command to Hosea, therefore, is contrary to all the Bible stands for. A similar contradiction is found in Abraham's experience with God. There can be no doubt about it that God does not condone murder and that He abhors human sacrifices. Yet, God said to Abraham: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you

<sup>1</sup> John 1:1

<sup>2</sup> See Num. 13:8,16

<sup>3</sup> See II Kings 14:25,26

love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”<sup>4</sup> In Abraham’s case, the immoral act was averted at the last moment, but Hosea had to go through with a marriage that contradicted everything he understood the will of God to be.

The three prevailing schools of interpretation of this paradoxical command are:

1. The text describes an allegory. Hosea did not really enter into an immoral marriage relationship, but he was told to use such a relationship as an object lesson.
2. Hosea married Gomer in good faith and realized later, at the consummation of the marriage, that his bride was a prostitute.
3. Hosea knew that Gomer was a prostitute when he married her and he simply obeyed God’s command.

Among those who consider Hosea’s marriage to be an allegory are authorities such as Jerome and Calvin. The latter writes: “The Lord had bidden him (the prophet) to relate this parable, so to speak, or this similitude, that the people might see, as in a living portraiture, their turpitude and perfidiousness. It is, in short, an exhibition in which the thing itself is not only set forth in words, but is also placed, as it were, before their eyes in a visible form.”

Among the proponents of the second interpretation, we find *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, which states: “The harlotry of his wife may well have developed after her marriage to the prophet, however. In retrospect Hosea would think of this marriage as providentially ordained by God, for it provided the analogy which he used in addressing Israel.”

I tend to accept the third option. However incomprehensible the command may have seemed to Hosea, he obeyed and married a woman he knew to be a prostitute. After all, the purpose of the command was for the prophet to experience personally and on a human level what God experiences. In the same manner, God wanted Abraham to feel what it meant to sacrifice his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved. Abraham could not have understood the full meaning of this sacrifice, but he can hardly have misinterpreted the emotional aspect of it. The fact that Abraham called the place of his sacrifice *Jehovah-jireh* indicates that God had shared with him something that cannot be expressed in words. We read: “So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”<sup>5</sup> Abraham’s mountain of sacrifice has traditionally been identified with the hill of Golgotha.

There are many other biblical instances in which God shares His deep emotions with those who have become His friends. Ezekiel had to mourn in muteness the loss of his wife. We read: “The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food [of mourners]. So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded. Then the people asked me, Wont you tell us what these things have to do with us? So I said to them, The word of the LORD came to me: Say to the house of Israel, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary--the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword. And you will do as I have done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food [of mourners]. You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.”<sup>6</sup> Sometimes there is deep pain in knowing the Lord intimately. David says: “The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them”<sup>7</sup> Often, this means sharing in the Lord’s suffering.

The Bible compares fellowship with God with a marriage relationship. Actually, it is the other way around. Isaiah states: “For your Maker is your husband--the LORD Almighty is his name--the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.”<sup>8</sup> And the apostle Paul, writing about the

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<sup>4</sup> Gen. 22:2

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 22:14

<sup>6</sup> Ezek. 24:15-24

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 25:14

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 54:5

sexual unity of husband and wife, writes: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church."<sup>9</sup> Our marriage relationships are images of the spiritual relationship man has with God. Any break of this relationship is tantamount to adultery, as is unfaithfulness between husband and wife.

God wanted Hosea to know what it feels like when the one you love betrays you. God loved Israel more than any of us can love our spouses. Jeremiah states: "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness." The Hebrew word rendered "loving-kindness" is *checed*, which is used for love within the legal bounds of a marriage relationship. God's relationship with His people is the real thing, what we experience as marriage is the shadow of a spiritual reality. Hosea would thus feel the pain as in a picture of God's eternal emotions.

It sounds strange, of course, that the children are also called "children of unfaithfulness" in the same context of the wife's unfaithfulness. We cannot say that, when Hosea legally married Gomer and she bore him a son, this child was illegitimate. The context suggests, however, that the second child, a girl called Lo-Ruhamah, was not Hosea's child but the fruit of an adulterous relationship Gomer had while married to the prophet. The compact style of the text makes it difficult to determine this.

## 2 The Children of Hosea and Gomer 1:3-9

**3 So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.**

**4 Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.**

**5 In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel."**

**6 Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them.**

**7 Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them-not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."**

**8 After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son.**

**9 Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.**

On Hosea's marriage with Gomer and the naming of his children, *Barnes Notes* observes: "The life of the prophet, and his union with one so unworthy of him, were a continued prophecy of God's mercy. The names of the children were a life-long admonition of His intervening judgments. Since Israel refused to hear God's words, He made the prophets sons, through the mere fact of their presence among them, their going out and coming in, and the names which He gave them, to be preachers to the people. He depicted in them and in their names what was to be, in order that, whenever they saw or heard of them, His warnings might be forced upon them, and those who would take warning, might be saved. If, with their mothers disgrace, these sons inherited and copied their mothers sins, then their names became even more expressive, that, being such as they were, they would be scattered by God, would not be owned by God as His people, or be pitied by Him."

God told Hosea to call the son Gomer bore him Jezreel. There is a rather complex play-on-words in this name that makes it difficult to unravel the meaning. Jacob was given the name Israel, or Yisrael, meaning "Prince of God." Jezreel is the name of a place (actually there are two places by that name in Palestine), but the word also means: "to sow" or "to scatter."

The gist of verses 4 and 5 seems to be that God would punish the Northern Kingdom and the house of Jehu for the sins committed by Jehu. This punishment would consist in the leading of the ten tribes of Israel into captivity and their being scattered among the nations of the world. The question that has been hotly debated is, what are the sins of Jehu?

An anonymous prophet, by order of Elisha, had anointed Jehu king of Israel, saying: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anoint you king over the LORD's people Israel. You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the LORD's servants shed by Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel-slave or free. I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like

<sup>9</sup> Eph. 5:31,32

the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. ”<sup>10</sup> Jehu had taken his mandate of the extermination of the house of Ahab very seriously and massacred everyone who had even been closely related, or who had even been friendly to the royal family. He had called the way in which he carried out his charge: “my zeal for the LORD.”<sup>11</sup> The Lord had even complimented Jehu for his zeal and told him: “Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.”<sup>12</sup>

It seems, however, that Jehu not only went beyond the directives God had given him, but that he had used it for his own advancement. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “That Jehu sent tribute to the King of Assyria, to secure to himself the throne which God had given him, falls in with his character and his half belief, using all means, human or divine, to establish his own end. In one and the same spirit he destroyed the Baal worshippers as adherents of Ahab, retained the calf-worship, courted the ascetic Jonadab son of Rechab, spoke of the death of Jehoram as the fulfillment of prophecy, and sought help from the King of Assyria... Though Jehu shed the blood of the house of Ahab in external obedience to God’s command, yet because his motive was only regard to his own political ends, as was proved by his adherence to Jeroboam’s sin in worshipping the golden calves, while he was rewarded temporarily for his measure of external obedience, the blood which he so shed to further his own ambition, and not from the pure principle of obedience to God, was counted as sin to him, and was ultimately visited with judgment on his descendants.”

The breaking of the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel was symbolic for the breaking of Israel’s military power. The valley of Jezreel was the appropriate place for the Northern Kingdom to meet its end. It had been Israel’s historic battlefield from the days of Gideon to the days of Hosea. King Saul had perished there as had King Josiah of Judah. It would be the place where the Assyrian army under King Shalmaneser would destroy Israel as a nation. This beautiful valley stretched from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and from the Carmel to the center of the land. *The Pulpit Commentary* calls it “the cockpit of Palestine.”

Actually, the destruction of the nation began with the end of Jehu’s dynasty. The son of Jeroboam II, Zechariah, was assassinated after a reign of only six months.<sup>13</sup> From that time on, anarchy was rampant. Shallum, who had committed the regicide, was killed after being one month in power.<sup>14</sup> Menahem stayed on the throne for ten years<sup>15</sup> and was followed by his son, Pekahiah, who yielded power for two years and was then also assassinated.<sup>16</sup> His assassin, Pekah, after a reign of twenty years, was in turn killed by Hoshea, Israel’s last king, who was taken into Assyrian captivity.<sup>17</sup> Jacob had said about Joseph: “But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob.”<sup>18</sup> Thus Joseph’s bow, which had been the emblem of Israel’s strength ever since Jacob pronounced his blessing upon his son, was broken in the valley of Jezreel.

Gomer’s second pregnancy was probably not the fruit of a relationship with her husband Hosea. There is a strong suggestion in the absence of the words, found in vs. 3: “she conceived and bore him...” that this child, as well as the next one, may not have been his. That means that Gomer probably continued her adulterous relations even while being married to Hosea.

The daughter born from this illicit liaison is called Lo-Ruhamah, meaning “no mercy,” or “not pitied.” It is the negative of the Hebrew word *racham*, which means compassion. The word occurs several

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<sup>10</sup> II Kings 9:6-9

<sup>11</sup> See II Kings 10:16

<sup>12</sup> II Kings 10:30

<sup>13</sup> II Kings 15:8-10

<sup>14</sup> II Kings 15:10

<sup>15</sup> II Kings 15:17

<sup>16</sup> II Kings 15:23-25

<sup>17</sup> II Kings 17:6

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 49:24

times in the Old Testament, as for instance in: “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, says the LORD your Redeemer.”<sup>19</sup> *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* states: “This is the heart of salvation by the suffering Servant-Messiah.” Both Paul and Peter use the name Lo-Ruhamah in their epistles. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans: “As he says in Hosea: I will call them `my people who are not my people; and I will call her `my loved one who is not my loved one.”<sup>20</sup> And in Peter’s First Epistle we read: “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”<sup>21</sup>

It is good to pause and imagine what the emotions of Hosea must have been when he learned that the wife he had married had become pregnant by another man and what his feelings were toward the child that was not his. And then when God told him to analyze his feelings because those were the sentiments God felt toward the people He loved. What a horrible way of entering into an intimate fellowship with God, or sharing in the sufferings of Christ! Even in a relationship of human beings, such sentiments are rarely shared, and never on such a level. In a way Hosea knew God more intimately than Moses of whom the Scripture states that God spoke to him “face to face.”<sup>22</sup> Hosea learned to know God in the most private of all relationships, and he probably wished he had not.

This breakdown of all emotional involvement in the birth of Lo-Ruhamah is put in even sharper contrast by placing it next to God’s love for the part of Israel that had remained faithful to Him: the Kingdom of Judah. The construction of the sentence in vs. 7 contains rich promises which could have been Israel’s, had they listened to the voice of the Lord. God promises salvation to Judah, not the kind that comes through a show of superior military force but by means of spiritual power. This is expressed in the words: “not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God.” The Hebrew uses the names *Elohim*, *YHWH*. *Elohim* is the plural form of *El*, suggesting the Trinity, and *YHWH* is the name of the God of revelation. This prophecy speaks of the coming of the savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

*Barnes Notes* states eloquently: “They were saved in Christ, the Lord and God of all, not by carnal weapons of warfare, but by the might of Him who saved them, and shook thrones and dominions, and who by His own Cross triumpheth over the hosts of the adversaries, and overthroweth the powers of evil, and giveth to those who love Him, to tread on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy. They were saved, not for any merits of their own, nor for anything in themselves. But when human means, and man’s works, such as he could do of his own free-will, and the power of his understanding, and the natural impulses of his affections, had proved unavailing, then he redeemed them by His Blood, and bestowed on them gifts and graces above nature, and filled them with His Spirit, and gave them to will and to do of His good pleasure. But this promise also was, and is, to the true Judah, i.e., to those who, as the name means, confess and praise God, and who, receiving Christ, who, as Man, was of the tribe of Judah, became His children, being re-born by His Spirit.” The Assyrian forces would gobble up the Northern Kingdom, but when the same forces attacked Judah, they were defeated by God’s direct intervention, without one arrow being shot. We read in the Book of Second Kings: “That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning-there were all the dead bodies!”<sup>23</sup>

Gomer’s third pregnancy, which resulted in the birth of a son called Lo-Ammi, seems to have been the fruit of the same illicit kind of relationship as the second one. In the commentary *The Message of Hosea*, the author Derek Kidner states in a footnote that Lo-Ammi may be rendered “more accurately, and I am not yours.” The author continues: “The wording of the Heb. may be meant to recall the I AM passage of Ex. 3 by the contrast to Ex. 3:12, But I am (or, will be) with you.”

The same author observes furthermore: “From one angle this oracle was simply factual: just as accurate as would have been Hosea’s disclaimer of paternity for his children. Israel might be nominally the

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<sup>19</sup> Isa. 54:7,8

<sup>20</sup> Rom. 9:25

<sup>21</sup> I Peter 2:10

<sup>22</sup> See Num. 12:8

<sup>23</sup> II Kings 19:35

Lords but in fact she was the child of her times and of her pagan world. Likewise Yahweh might be nominally her national God; but since He is not for sharing, the presence of other gods flatly denied the relationship.”

Israel had come a long way from being “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”<sup>24</sup> to being utterly rejected by God. Most commentators see in the birth of the three children: a boy, a girl, and a boy the features of three generations of the Northern Kingdom. *Barnes Notes* observes: “The name of this third child expresses the last final degree of chastisement. As the scattering by God did not involve the being wholly unpitied; so neither did the being wholly unpitied for the time involve the being wholly rejected, so as to be no more His people. There were corresponding degrees in the actual history of the kingdom of Israel. God withdrew his protection by degrees. Under Jeroboam, in whose reign was this beginning of Hosea’s prophecy, the people was yet outwardly strong. This strength has been thought to be expressed by the sex of the oldest child, that he was a son. On this, followed extreme weakness, full of mutual massacre and horrible cruelty, first, in a long anarchy, then under Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hosea, within, and through the invasions of Pul, Tiglathpileser, Shalmaneser, kings of Assyria, from without. The sex of the daughter, Lo-Ruhamah, Unpitied, corresponds with this increasing weakness, and breaking of the spirit. When she was weaned, i.e., when the people were deprived of all consolation and all the spiritual food whereby they had here to be supported, prophecy, teaching, promises, sacrifices, grace, favor, consolation, it became wholly Lo-ammi, not My people. As a distinct part of God’s people, it was cast off forever; and yet it became outwardly strong, as the Jews became powerful, and often were the persecutors of the Christians. The same is seen in individuals. God often first chastens them lightly, then more heavily, and brings them down in their iniquities; but if they still harden themselves, He withdraws both His chastisements and His grace, so that the sinner even prospers in this world, but, remaining finally impenitent, is cast off forever.”

By instituting the pseudo religion of Bethel and Dan, Jeroboam I had declared his independence from God, while maintaining the family name. This rejection now was brought to an end in God’s rejection of His people. As *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states: “We must observe that those children whose names carried these direful omens in them to Israel were all children of whoredoms (v. 2), all born of the harlot that Hosea married, to intimate that the ruin of Israel was the natural product of the sin of Israel. If they had not first revolted from God, they would never have been rejected by him; God never leaves any till they first leave him.”

### 3. The Application of Future Restoration 1:10--2:1

**10** *“Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people, they will be called ‘sons of the living God.*

**11** *The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.*

**2:1** *“Say of your brothers, ‘My people, and of your sisters, ‘My loved one.*

The sudden change in tone in these verses comes as a complete surprise and as evidence of God’s deep emotions in pronouncing judgment. The Eternal One could not stand the thought of completely annihilating the people He loved and He felt the need to look beyond the horizon of that age to the time of restoration. That is the aspect the apostle Peter caught on in the above quoted epistle, applying it to those who had converted from paganism: “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”<sup>25</sup>

The image of the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted, refers to God’s promise to Abraham, after his aborted sacrifice of Isaac. God had said to him: “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies.”<sup>26</sup>

Some commentators take the words “in the place” as a reference to a certain location. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the Chaldee version of vs. 10 reads: “And it shall come to pass in the place where

<sup>24</sup> See Ex. 19:6

<sup>25</sup> I Peter 2:10

<sup>26</sup> Gen. 22:17



they lived in exile among the peoples, when they transgressed my Law and it was said to them, Ye are not my people, they will turn and be magnified, and called the people of God." I suppose, however, this could be understood to mean "instead of."

As is clear from the application of this promise in the New Testament, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham goes well beyond the ethnical and geographical limitations of Israel proper. The translation of the text loses something of the graphic impact of the Hebrew, in which the names *Lo-Ruhamah* and *Lo-Ammi* are changed to *Ruhamah* and *Ammi*, "Loved" and "My people."

Hosea's prophecy in the last verse of this chapter seemingly never saw fulfillment. There never was a reunification of the two kingdoms that were formed after the death of Solomon. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "Even if we admit the return from the captivity of Babylon to be a fulfillment, it would be but a very partial, though literal, fulfillment of such a grand prediction. That restoration was far too meager in its dimensions to come up to the requirements of, much less exhaust, such a splendid prophecy. Some of Israel — a mere fragment of the ten tribes — united with Judah in the return from Babylon: this poor miniature fulfillment, if we may so say, cannot be regarded, except perhaps typically or symbolically, as the fulfillment of the prophets vivid picture. We must look to gospel times and gospel scenes for the realization of the glorious promise under consideration. Jewish interpreters themselves refer it to the times of Messiah. Thus Kimchi says, 'This shall take place in the gathering together of the exiles in the days of the Messiah, for unto the second house there went up only Judah and Benjamin that had been exiles in Babylon; nor were the children of Judah and the children of Israel gathered together; and they shall make for themselves one head, — this is the King Messiah.'"

The words "they will appoint one leader" can, therefore, only be understood as an acceptance by the Jews of Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The way in which this will occur is stated prophetically by Zechariah: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."<sup>27</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Though appointed by the Father (Ps 2:6), Christ is in another sense appointed as their Head by His people, when they accept and embrace Him as such."

The greatest surprise of vs. 11 is in the reversal of the meaning of the word "Jezeel." As we saw above, *Yizre'el* means "to scatter," or "to sow." When the word was used in the condemnatory sense, it referred to the captivity; in the restorative sense it means to be planted again in the Promised Land. *Barnes Notes* explains: "When God threatened, Jezeel necessarily meant, God shall scatter; here, when God reverses His threatening, it means, God shall sow. But the issue of the seed is either single, as in human birth, or manifold, as in the seed-corn. Hence, it is used either of Him who was eminently, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of the woman, or the manifold harvest, which He, the seed-corn (John 12:24), should bring forth, when sown in the earth, by His vicarious Death. It means, then, Christ or His Church. Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God before all worlds, was, in time, also conceived by the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God Alone, in a way in which no other man was born of God. Great then should be the day, when God should sow, or give the increase in mercy, as before He scattered them, in His displeasure." "Great will be the day of Jezeel" is almost an understatement; it will be the greatest day that ever was, or ever will be!

### **C. The Application of the Adultery of Gomer      2:2-23**

#### **1. Israel's Sin of Spiritual Adultery      2:2-5**

**2 "Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.**

**3 Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst.**

**4 I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery.**

**5 Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.**

Our interpretation of these verses will depend upon our view of the opening verses of this book. If we maintain that Hosea's marriage to Gomer was never an actual marriage consummated in a physical sense,

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<sup>27</sup> Zech. 12:10

the text before us must be taken metaphorically. If, however, we understand that Hosea actually married a prostitute, then Gomer's children are the ones addressed here. We lean toward the latter interpretation.

The opening words are almost as shocking as God's command to Hosea to marry a harlot. The statement amounts to a bill of divorce. The Hebrew word, translated "rebuke" is *riyb*, which has a variety of meanings. It can mean "to plead," but also "to strive," or "to chide." *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* translates it: "to plead, strive, conduct a legal case, make a charge." Nehemiah uses the same word when confronting the noblemen who charged outrageous interest to their poor countrymen. We read: "When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then *accused* the nobles and officials. I told them, You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!"<sup>28</sup> David says in one of the psalms: "He will not always *accuse*, nor will he harbor his anger forever."<sup>29</sup> The NKJV captures the mood well with: "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges."

The gist of the verse is that Hosea says to his children: "Accuse your mother!" Marital unfaithfulness breaks the mutual trust of its partners, but even more it shakes the relationship of the children to the parents to its very foundation. In the breaking up of a marriage, children are the main victims. Children need the protection of the strong love only a father can provide in the family. When that is lacking, they can survive but not without its scars. When, however, the warmth of motherly affection is removed, a child cannot survive. Moreover, harmony between husband and wife creates a safe environment in which children thrive. Hosea's desperate cry: "Accuse your mother!" means the total breakdown of all protection for the children. They are left defenseless. They are a prey for the enemy of their souls. As far as they are concerned, their umbilical cord is being severed for the second time.

When I studied in Belgium, a Roman Catholic priest left his church and became a protestant clergyman. He had become appalled by the conditions of the church and felt he could not keep his integrity by continuing to serve. He wrote a book entitled: "*Mother, I accuse you!*" However devastating this man's experience may have been, it cannot match the effect Hosea's exclamation must have had upon Jezreel, Lo-Ammi, and Lo-Ruhamah. They were dragged into their father's agony without in any way being responsible for it. They learned as children to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

The point of this experience is, of course, not the misery of man but the emotions of God. It may be difficult for us to imagine that the eternal and immutable God would be subject to the same kind of suffering we as humans experience. Yet, unless Hosea's case is an illustration of what it means that man is created in the image of God, the whole story makes no sense. God allows us to feel what He feels. We must understand how deeply our individual sins, as well as our sin as a nation, can hurt Him.

Hosea's family picture is, however, more complicated than it seems. Derek Kidner, in *The Message of Hosea*, states: "The focus shifts now from the children to the mother, and for a little while the whole distracted family is in view together. But as material for God's analogy they will mostly have to play their separate parts. From one angle, Israel in her apostasy could be compared to a brood of children out of control (Jezreel, 1:4) or born out of wedlock (1:6-9), but from another angle Israel is like a fickle wife. The second of these will be the main theme of our chapter; but at its beginning and end the children make a brief but memorable appearance. Insofar as they stand for a separate entity within Israel, they are perhaps the actual hearers over against the corporate Israel whose history has made them what they are."

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* adds to this: "Jehovah is the speaker, and the command to get rid of the whoredom is addressed to the Israelites, who are represented as the children of the adulterous wife. The distinction between mother and children forms part of the figurative drapery of the thought; for, in fact, the mother had no existence apart from the children. The nation or kingdom, regarded as an ideal unity, is called the mother; whereas the several members of the nation are the children of this mother. The summons addressed to the children to contend or reason with this mother, that she may give up her adultery, presupposes that, although the nation regarded as a whole was sunken in idolatry, the individual members of it were not all equally slaves to it, so as to have lost their susceptibility for the divine warning, or the possibility of conversion."

Gomer's impertinent flirting with other men, as well as the perversion of her character, are expressed in the words: "Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts." Gomer must have carried on her amorous affairs in secrecy, under the cover of darkness. Adultery and daylight do not mix. More than physical darkness is involved. The only instance of

<sup>28</sup> Neh. 5:6,7

<sup>29</sup> Ps. 103:9

adultery practiced in broad daylight, recorded in Scripture, is when Absalom raped the concubines of his father.<sup>30</sup>

In threatening to strip Gomer and expose her nakedness, God threatens to remove the cover of sin. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they confessed to feeling naked before God.<sup>31</sup> God provided a form of atonement for their sin by covering their nakedness with the skin of an animal. Gomer's nakedness represents the removal of this cover of atonement. A human being, standing naked before God, is exposed to the fatal radiation of God's holiness. Without the cover of the righteousness of Jesus Christ we would be hopelessly lost. Yet, sin that is exposed to the light does not survive. In the words of the apostle Paul: "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light."<sup>32</sup>

*Barnes Notes* makes the profound observation: "There is an outward visible nakedness and an inward, which is invisible. The invisible nakedness is, when the soul within is bared of the glory and the grace of God. The visible nakedness is the privation of God's temporal and visible gifts, the goods of this world, or outward distinction. God's inward gifts the sinful soul or nation despises, while those outward gifts she prizes. And therefore, when the soul parts with the inward ornaments of God's grace, He strips her of the outward, His gifts of nature, of His providence and of His protection, if so be, through her outward misery and shame and poverty, she may come to feel that deeper misery and emptiness and disgrace within, which she had had no heart to feel. So, when our first parents lost the robe of innocence, they knew that they were naked (Gen 3:7)."

It is difficult to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of Hosea in these verses. At some point they seem to mingle; picture and reality are presented simultaneously. Hosea's family reflects the spiritual condition of Israel as a nation. The real adultery is Israel's idolatry. The majority of the Israelites did not love the LORD their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength.<sup>33</sup> They were steeped deeply in idolatrous practices, some of which were too horrible to describe.

Hosea's threat to publicly expose Gomer's immoral behavior, expressed in the words "I will strip her naked" are applied straightforwardly to the territory of the Northern Kingdom. The "Land of Milk and Honey" would be turned into a desert. The nakedness of the land would be in the removal of its inhabitants. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: "This punishment for adultery is attested in Scripture (Ezek 16:38) and in the Nuzi tablets from northern Mesopotamia." God had warned the Israelites, even before they entered Canaan: "But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the immorality to the inhabitants caused ecological changes in the land to the point where the modern kibbutz in Israel could not survive without the help of sophisticated irrigation. Man's sin has its fallout in the world in which he sins. As the apostle Paul says: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."<sup>35</sup>

Another play-on-words is found in the words "I will not show my love," which reads in Hebrew *lo racham*. The name *Lo-Ruhamah* was formed from that construction. It must have been very difficult for Hosea to show any natural affection to Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi, the two children that were not his. This must have made him understand God's feelings toward those who are named "the children of adultery." In

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<sup>30</sup> See II Sam 16:21,22

<sup>31</sup> Gen. 3:7-10

<sup>32</sup> Eph. 5:13 (NASU)

<sup>33</sup> See Deut. 6:5

<sup>34</sup> Lev. 18:26-28

<sup>35</sup> Rom. 8:19-22

the prophet's family, the children could not be blamed for being born out of wedlock, but in the real of spiritual reality, the Israelites who committed idolatry were responsible for their behavior.

*Barnes Notes* observes about the phrasing "children of adultery": As they who live honestly, as in the day and in the light, are called children of the day and of the light, so they who live a defiled life are called the children of whoredom.... To call them children of whoredom is all one with saying, that they too are incorrigible or unchangeable. For of such, Wisdom, after saying, executing Thy judgments upon them by little and little, added immediately (Wisd. 12:10,11), not being ignorant that thy were a naughty generation, and that their malice was bred in them, and that their cogitation would never be changed, for it was a cursed seed from the beginning. All this is here expressed briefly by this word, that they are the children of whoredom, meaning that their malice too was inbred, and that they, as much as the Amorite and Hittite, were a cursed seed. Nor yet, in so speaking, did he blame the nature which God created, but he vehemently reproves the abuse of nature, that malice, which cleaves to nature but was no part of it, was by custom changed into nature."

Whether the words of vs. 5 are literally what Gomer told Hosea is not clear. They indicate, however, that Gomer was not merely unfaithful to her husband but that she did play the role of a prostitute to the point that she received payment for what she did. In the context of Israel's relationship with God, the words must be interpreted as meaning that Israel credited her idols for the good harvests and blamed God for the droughts that devastated the country. Some commentators believe Gomer's lovers to be Egypt and Assyria from whom Israel expected protection for political stability. It seems more logical to interpret them to be the idols that were worshipped. Some of the ancient Jewish scholars see in them the sun, moon, and stars that were deified.

After the people of Judah were taken into captivity to Babylon, Jeremiah records a similar reaction to his preaching by the people who had been left behind: "Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other God's , along with all the women who were present--a large assembly--and all the people living in Lower and Upper Egypt, said to Jeremiah, We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine. The women added, When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?"<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Judgment of God

2:6-13

*6 Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way.*

*7 She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'*

*8 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.*

*9 "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 nakedness.*

*10 So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands.*

*11 I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days-all her appointed feasts.*

*12 I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them.*

*13 I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD.*

God's judgment upon the Northern Kingdom is presented as the putting up of obstacles, which prevents the nation from reaching its unholy goals. This is expressed in the images of a double fence: the

<sup>36</sup> Jer. 44:15-19

thornbushes and the wall. The primary, typical application to Gomer means that she will no longer be able to contact her lovers; the application to the nation of Israel, the antitype, means that her alliances with Egypt and Assyria will not be realized.

In Lamentations, Jeremiah picks up the image by saying: "He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked."<sup>37</sup> *Barnes Notes* observes: "A way may be found through a hedge of thorns, although with pain and suffering; through a stone wall even a strong man cannot burst a way. Thorns then may be the pains to the flesh, with which God visits sinful pleasures, so that the soul, if it would break through to them, is held back and torn; the wall may mean, that all such sinful joys shall be cut off altogether, as by bereavement, poverty, sickness, failure of plans, etc. In sorrows, we cannot find our idols, which, although so near, vanish from us; but we may find our God, though we are so far from Him, and He so often seems so far from us. God hedgeth with thorns the ways of the elect, when they find prickles in the things of time, which they desire. They attain not the pleasures of this world which they crave. They cannot find their paths, when, in the special love of God, they are hindered from obtaining what they seek amiss. I escaped not Thy scourges, says Augustine, as to his pagan state, for what mortal can? For Thou wert ever with me, mercifully rigorous, and with most bitter alloy all my unlawful pleasures, that I might seek pleasure without alloy. But where to find such, I could not discover, save in Thee, O Lord, who teachest by sorrow, and woundest us, to heal, and killest us, lest we die from Thee (Conf. ii. 4)."

Finding herself unable to pursue her immoral lifestyle, Gomer, like the prodigal son in the parable, might decide to return to her husband to whom she is legally married. In reality this turns out to be God's "wishful thinking." The kingdom of Judah would at least learn her lesson in the Babylonian captivity and abandon idolatry once and for all. With the Northern Kingdom, there would never be a return from captivity. Evidently, God had not intended to turn the Assyrian captivity into a final rejection of the nation of Israel. We don't know what factors changed God's plan. Among the captives in Babylon there remained the hope of return to the place of God's revelation. The psalmist sang: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy."<sup>38</sup> Israel in captivity never felt that way about the calves of Dan and Bethel. The fact that those were not places of God's revelation easily accounts for this.

Gomer's return to Hosea cannot be seen as a genuine sign of conversion. Hers was more a pragmatic decision than a change of heart. I remember the confession of a polygamist tribesman in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, who told me that he had repented and henceforth was the husband of only one wife. As it turned out, he had fallen ill and two of his three wives had left him since he was unable to maintain a sexual relationship with three women. I asked him if he would have "repented" if he had remained in good health, and he admitted that he wouldn't. A change of behavior because of a change in circumstances is no indication of a change of heart. Jesus' indictment of the people of His time was not because they were idolaters, but because they did not have the love of God in their heart.<sup>39</sup>

The failure of the harvests, described in verses 9-12, appears to have a moral connotation. The grain, wine, wool, and linen production had been the means needed of continuing the spiritual immorality of idolatry. The lack of those would mean a decline in festivity and a lack of clothing. Israel's embarrassment would consist in the exposure of her spiritual nakedness. We find the New Testament counterpart to the Northern Kingdom in the character of the church in Laodicea. John describes Jesus' indictment in Revelation: "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm- neither hot nor cold- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lam. 3:7,9

<sup>38</sup> Ps. 137:1,5,6

<sup>39</sup> See John 5:42

<sup>40</sup> Rev. 3:14-18

In his commentary *The Message of Hosea*, the author Derek Kidner states: "The prosaic facts behind the poetry of verse 5 (which would have been self-evident to those who heard it first) are that the God's of Canaan were largely patrons of fertility. To get the best results of farming one would be tempted to enlist their help, imagining that Yahweh must be somewhat out of His depths in such a realm. (And she did not know, the Lord exclaims, that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil...., verse 8.) More than that, these God's were Baals, meaning lords or husbands, and while some of their rituals were a re-enacting of their wars and victories, or of vegetations' death and resurrection, which would supposedly ensure the progress of the seasons and the crops, other rituals were sexual acts with cultic prostitutes, whereby the coitus at the sanctuary would magically induce fertility in the flocks and herds and farm-produce. These beliefs and half-beliefs are not as foreign or remote from our age as they may seem. The idea that the Lord God has little relevance to the natural world is taken for granted by our secularized majority, and can be a hidden influence on even the minority who would consciously reject it. Whether His place is taken by a rational construct such as nature or by the fantasies of astrology or by recourse to the occult and the demonic, it amounts to a modern dethroning of God which is hardly different from His displacement by the Baals. And this is not the only similarity between our age and theirs. If sex was deified in polytheistic thought, it receives almost equal adulation in our own. The crude pagan symbols of fertility, the likening of El or Baal to a bull, the sexual act at the sanctuary, these were not pointless pornography but expressions of a belief that this kind of potency and fecundity is what life and the world itself are chiefly about. But with it there was the fascination of the forbidden and decadent – the exciting exchange of Yahweh's broad daylight for the twilight world of violent gods, with their raw passions, cruelties and ecstasies; an exchange which has a perennial appeal."

The vine and the fig tree in Israel were symbols of peace and stability. Scripture records for instance: "During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree."<sup>41</sup> The ruin of the vine and the fig tree meant the shaking of the nation to its very foundations. Asaph had prophesied about this in one of his beautiful psalms. We read: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved."<sup>42</sup> Asaph's reference to the Messiah, "the man at your right hand, the son of man," also shows the extent of the salvation God provides for mankind.

### 3. Restoration of Israel

2:14-23

**14** *"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.*

**15** *There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.*

**16** *"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me `my husband; you will no longer call me `my master.*

**17** *I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked.*

**18** *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.*

**19** *I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.*

**20** *I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.*

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<sup>41</sup> I Kings 4:25

<sup>42</sup> Ps. 80:8-19

**21 "In that day I will respond," declares the LORD- "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth;**

**22 and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel.**

**23 I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called `Not my loved one. I will say to those called `Not my people, `You are my people; and they will say, `You are my God."**

In these verses God reveals Himself as the great tempter, the one who lures the soul to Himself as a lover would his beloved. The tone of this section is almost like the music in the Song of Songs, only it is one-sided. In reality, Israel never responded to God's enticements, and we are tempted to conclude that the Lord indulged in wishful thinking. In a way, this segment describes God as dreaming a lover's dream. The fact that Israel did not respond and the nation of the Northern Kingdom dead-ended in the Assyrian captivity does not mean that God was wrong. The message of God's passionate love comes through loud and clear and it is the greatest stimulus to the church of Jesus Christ in the present.

The first lesson we learn from these verses is that God's love is not forced upon man. Man has the awful liberty to reject God's love and grace. Grace is not irresistible in the sense that we have to submit to it whether we like it or not.

Secondly, we understand that erotic love as it is experienced between male and female is as much an expression of the divine character as *agape* love. James controversial quotation may be applied here: "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously."<sup>43</sup> The spirit of man, which God created in His own image, is subject to divine jealousy. God cannot stand it when we give our first love to any other person than to Him.

Thirdly, it is clear that our being punished is harder on God than on us. The violent denunciations of the previous chapter broke the heart of the Father. Hosea's jealous reaction to Gomer's infidelity was only a vague reflection of God's eternal emotions about man's lack of response. When Adam sinned, we can hear the sob in God's question: "Where are you?"<sup>44</sup> In more than one sense, in Jesus, God died of a broken heart.

The place where God lures us is significant. Israel was born as a nation in the desert. All roads to the Promised Land lead through the desert. It is the place Moses called: "that vast and dreadful desert."<sup>45</sup> Nothing depicts the conditions of life in better terms than the word "desert." In drawing Israel to the desert, God makes the nation take some steps back in history to remember from where they came and how they arrived at the place of their present residence. Retracing ones step provides an excellent reality check.

Derek Kidner, in his commentary *The Message of Hosea*, states beautifully: "So now, out of disaster and exile the Lord plans to create as fruitful a new area as that which the Exodus had promised to bring in. What has been lost in judgment can be restored in mercy – the ruined vines of verse 12 answered by the vineyards of 15 – and what had spoil the first victorious progress need not mar the second. That old reproach, the Valley of Achor at the gateway of the promised land (that is, the Valley of Trouble and of Achan's sin; Jos. 7:26), can be not just forgotten but renamed: the Door or Gate of Hope – for when God forgives, He does it handsomely, and in this single line of verse 15 He lays the ghosts of not only Israel's past but, by analogy, the past of any repentant sinner."

God takes His people back to the place where they had entered the Promised Land, to the valley south of Jericho. The Valley of Achor was the place of Achan's execution. Achan had caused Israel's defeat by taking for himself some of the spoil of Jericho, which God had placed under the ban. The stones that were piled upon the bodies of Achan and his family formed a gruesome monument, a reminder of a moral failure. God's magic touch transformed this failure into hope.

The Hebrew word translated "hope" is *tiqvah*, which literally means "a cord." It is what Rahab tied to the window of her house as a security that saved her and her family in the destruction of Jericho. We read: "And she tied the scarlet *cord* in the window."<sup>46</sup> It is the same word David used in one of the psalms: "Find

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<sup>43</sup> James 4:5 (NKJV)

<sup>44</sup> Gen. 3:9

<sup>45</sup> Deut. 1:19

<sup>46</sup> Josh. 2:21

rest, O my soul, in God alone; my *hope* comes from him.”<sup>47</sup> It is the anchor of the soul that links us to the throne of God. In the words of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”<sup>48</sup> Isaiah also mentions the same valley as a pastoral retreat where people will find the Lord. We read: “Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for my people who seek me.”<sup>49</sup>

The singing of Israel to which Hosea refers probably alludes to the hymn of praise that the people sang after the destruction of the Egyptian army, which drowned to the last man in the Red Sea.<sup>50</sup> It is the hymn of victory that will be sung, according to the Book of Revelation by “those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.”<sup>51</sup>

God is speaking here to people who, just a few verses before, were compared to a harlot. As far as victorious living is concerned, they were the lowest class imaginable and the farthest removed from God’s paradigm for man. In simply responding to God’s wooing they were not only picked up out of the gutters of life but transformed into human beings who have become “more than conquerors through him who loved [them].”<sup>52</sup>

In the NIV’s rendering of vs. 16, the distinction made in Hebrew does not come through clearly. We read: “In that day, declares the LORD, you will call me `my husband; you will no longer call me `my master.” The NASU reads: “It will come about in that day, declares the LORD, That you will call Me Ishi. And will no longer call Me Baali.”

The word *Ishi* has a rather broad meaning in Hebrew, referring to man in all his characteristics of being a male. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: “Basically, this word signifies man in correspondence to woman; a man is a person who is distinguished by maleness. In the context of Hosea’s prophecy, it speaks of affection. There is nothing improper in the use of the word Baal in a marriage relation, except for the fact that the word had been misused in the practice of idolatry. God does not want this word to be applied to Him any longer, not because of a loss of authority but because of previous associations the use of the word might evoke. Jesus expressed clearly the intent of Hosea’s words when He said to His disciples: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his masters business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”<sup>53</sup>

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on verses 18-20: “Ancient Hittite covenants, were of two kinds: (1) parity covenants between equals; (2) suzerainty covenants between a sovereign and his subjects. The covenant between God and Israel was of the latter type. The Biblical covenant partakes of the nature of an ordinance with the beasts of the field. Nature itself will be at peace with restored Israel (cf. Isa 11:1-9).”

It is obvious that the prediction of the renewal of these marriage vows reaches well beyond the limits of time and Israel’s history. In any period of time when Israel even come close to return to the Lord in the way Hosea’s prophecy describes, the reconciliation never had such a far reaching effect upon all of nature. In Isaiah’s prophecy, referred to by *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, the transformation of all of creation is linked to the coming of the Messiah and the millennial blessing this brings about. We read: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his

<sup>47</sup> Ps. 62:5

<sup>48</sup> Heb. 6:19

<sup>49</sup> Isa. 65:10

<sup>50</sup> See Ex. 15:1-21

<sup>51</sup> See Rev. 15:2,3

<sup>52</sup> Rom 8:37

<sup>53</sup> John 15:15



mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."<sup>54</sup>

The apostle Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."<sup>55</sup> Hosea's conditions will be fulfilled in the end time when God makes all things new.<sup>56</sup> This is realized in the vision John saw in the Book of Revelation. He reports: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."<sup>57</sup>

If we put the present condition of God's people and of the world in which we live next to this "idyllic dream" of God, we realize how far we, and mankind as a whole, have strayed from God's original plan with His creation. It also makes us understand that the wars that are fought and the crimes against humanity that are committed are the results of the fact that man does not "love the LORD [his] God with all [his] heart and with all [his] soul and with all [his] strength."<sup>58</sup> It is only after the renewal of the vows that the weapons of mass destruction are destroyed. Isaiah makes a similar prediction: "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."<sup>59</sup>

The last three verses of this chapter depict in beautiful poetic language God's answer to the prayers of His creation. Heaven and earth are personified as creatures that pray to their Creator and their prayers are answered. Blessing is portrayed in symbols of rain and a harvest of oil and wine. When we enter into the meaning of Hosea's words, we feel as if we are entering a treasure chamber filled with beauty beyond description. The import of the pictures transports us from the dust of the earth to the gold of the New Jerusalem.

It is as if God looks beyond the prayer of the farmer, who prays for the rain needed to produce the harvest, to the elements of creation themselves. It is not just the farmer who prays, the earth itself cries out and the sky itself calls to God. This is not an animistic worldview that is propagated here but a look beyond the picture of creation as a whole into the meaning of it all. God had placed man as ruler over His creation. Man lost this place when he sinned and broke the bond of fellowship with God. This left creation like a ship without a rudder and anchor. Man's disorientation became nature's disorientation. In Hosea's prophecy, God calls creation back to Himself, and in doing so, He calls man back to Himself.

The greatest beauty, however, is not found in the answered prayer of nature and in the harvest the land produces but in the people, covered here under the name Jezreel. The use of this name captures the essence of this prophecy. Earlier in this chapter God had said: "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready." Here grain and wine are restored. Earlier in the book, Hosea's first child was called Jezreel in order to announce punishment for the crimes committed at the place that bore that name. As we saw, Jezreel has the double meaning of "to scatter," or "to sow." In these verses Jezreel acquires this second, positive meaning. *Barnes Notes* observes: "God here calls Israel by the name of

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<sup>54</sup> Isa. 11:1-9

<sup>55</sup> Rom. 8:19-21

<sup>56</sup> See Rev. 21:5

<sup>57</sup> Rev. 21:1,2,11

<sup>58</sup> Deut. 6:5

<sup>59</sup> Isa. 2:4

Jezreel, repealing, once more in the close of this prophecy, His sentence, conveyed through the names of the three children of the prophet. The name Jezreel combines in one, the memory of the former punishment and the future mercy. God did not altogether do away the temporal part of His sentence. He had said, I will scatter; and, although some were brought back with Judah, Israel remained scattered in all lands, in Egypt and Greece and Italy, Asia Minor, and the Far East and West. But God turned His chastisement into mercy to those who believed in Him. Now he changes the meaning of the word into, God shall sow. Israel, in its dispersion, when converted to God, became everywhere the preacher of Him whom they had persecuted; and in Him-the true Seed, whom God sowed in the earth and it brought forth much fruit, converted Israel also bore, some a hundred-fold; some sixty; some thirty. ”

The renaming of Gomer’s children exemplifies the true meaning of grace. Although the name Jezreel remains the same, the meaning is changed. But Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi are transformed in to Ruhamah and Ammi. Although the name Ruhamah is not mentioned at this point, the topic of this section is grace, which is the meaning of the name. What Hosea proclaims here, Paul states in a New Testament context: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere, the apostle quotes Hosea’s words directly in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says: “What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory- even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: I will call them `my people who are not my people; and I will call her `my loved one who is not my loved one, and, it will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, `You are not my people, they will be called `sons of the living God. ”<sup>61</sup>

What happens to a human being, who turns to the Lord and confesses his sin, is beyond our wildest imagination. Paul correctly states: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus illustrates this truth in the Parable of the Prodigal. The son may have had ulterior motives when he said: “How many of my fathers hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men. ” He never expected that his father would respond by embracing him and say: “Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Lets have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. ”<sup>63</sup> “Amazing grace” may be the understatement of the centuries. Such grace is more than amazing it is overwhelming and astounding!

The words: “I will say... ‘You are my people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God’ ” are amazing statements also. When Jacob fled from his brother Esau and had his dream at Bethel, he made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the LORD will be my God.”<sup>64</sup> This kind of conditional contract is not what is meant here. It is more like Thomas’ confession, when he saw the risen Jesus and exclaimed: “My Lord and my God!”<sup>65</sup> It is a miracle of grace, as we saw, that God would say to people who had committed spiritual adultery: “You are My people.” It is just as amazing that human beings who had severed the bond of fellowship with their Creator can name the Name of God and put the personal pronoun “my” in front of it. The words remind us of the relationship of the lovers in the Song of Songs, where the bride states: “My lover is mine and I am his.”<sup>66</sup>

*Barnes’ Notes* observes eloquently: “There seems to be more affectionateness in the brief answer, which sums up the whole relation of the creature to the Creator in that one word, ‘Elohai, my God.’ The

<sup>60</sup> II Cor. 5:17

<sup>61</sup> Rom. 9:23-26

<sup>62</sup> I Cor. 2:9

<sup>63</sup> Luke 15:17-19,22-24

<sup>64</sup> Gen. 28:20,21

<sup>65</sup> John 20:28

<sup>66</sup> Songs 2:16; 6:3; 7:10

prophet declares, as before, that, when God thus anew called them His people, they by His grace would obey His call, and surrender themselves wholly to Him. For to say, 'my God,' is to own an exclusive relation to God alone. It is to say, my beginning and my end, my hope and my salvation, my whole and only good, in whom alone I will hope, whom alone I will fear, love, worship, trust in, obey and serve, with all my heart, mind, soul and strength; my God and my all."

#### **D. The Restoration of Gomer to Hosea**

3:1-5

**1 The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other God's and love the sacred raisin cakes."**

**2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.**

**3 Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."**

**4 For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.**

**5 Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.**

*The Pulpit Commentary* introduces this chapter with the remarks: "This short chapter contains two sections, of which the first, comprising vers. 1-3, is a symbolic representation; and the second, consisting of vers. 4 and 5, gives the explanation. The prophet bestows his affections on a worthless wife, who, notwithstanding his tender love to her, proves utterly unfaithful and lives in adultery. He does not cast her off, but, in order to reclaim her and bring her to repentance, he places her in a position of restraint, where she is obliged to renounce all intercourse with her paramours. Thus it was with Israel. They had had multiplied experience of God's loving-kindness and tender mercies, but in spite of all his benefits, great and manifold, they were alike ungrateful and unfaithful. The remainder of the chapter foretells the long and sorrowful abandonment of Israel, as though forgotten by God and forsaken by man; and closes with an outlook into the far-off future, when Israel's correction would issue in their conversion, so that they would return to the Lord their God and David their king in the latter days."

We believe, however, that the command to show love to Gomer was not symbolic. It sounds the same as in the first chapter, but there is a difference in the fact that Hosea had already married Gomer. Evidently, she had not only indulged in an extra-marital affair but had even sold herself to her lover. The directive now is not only that Hosea take her back, but that he show love to her. We can understand how emotionally upsetting the Lord's command must have been to the prophet. It was like the ripping open of a wound. Henceforth, no one could better understand the depth of God's secret pain than Hosea; he experienced in his own soul the extent of the divine jealousy God felt for mankind which He loves and which turned its back on Him.

According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the words "is loved by another," or "beloved of her friend" can also mean: "a lover of evil." *The Commentary* states: "the Hebrew words 'ahubat... r-' means one who loves evil or loves a friend: because r-` signifies a friend or evil, according to how its vowels are pointed. The former seems to be its best sense here; *reea`* ... is a friend; *ra`* ... is evil."

In order to have his wife back, Hosea is forced to pay a price for her, consisting of "fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley." TLB paraphrases the verse: "So I bought her [back from her slavery] for a couple of dollars and eight bushels of barley." These words are pregnant with meaning when one considers the price that is paid for our redemption. We are reminded of Peter's words: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."<sup>67</sup> There is an eternal difference between the price Hosea paid for Gomer and the one God has paid for us; it is beyond comparison. However deeply the transaction may have affected Hosea emotionally, his wife's redemption did not cost him anything when compared with the price God paid in the

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<sup>67</sup> I Peter 1:18,19

death of His Son. We are reminded of Paul's words: "You were bought at a price."<sup>68</sup> And the glorious words John heard about our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven: "You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God."<sup>69</sup>

Regarding the relatively small price Hosea paid for the recovery of his legal wife, *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "By turning to Exodus 21:32 we learn that thirty shekels were the estimated value of a manservant or maidservant; for it is there stated that 'if the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant, he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver.' The price paid by the prophet partly in money and partly in kind was exactly the price of an ordinary maidservant. The barley..., (plural, equivalent to 'grains of barley') may hint the woman's unchastity, as it was the offering for a woman suspected of adultery (Numbers 5). The low estate of the person purchased is a legitimate inference concerning all this. The wife, for whom such a paltry sum should be paid, and paid in such a way, or to whom such a petty gift would be offered, must be supposed to be in a condition of deep depression or in circumstances of great distress. Thus the sum paid by the prophet for his partner symbolizes the servile state of Israel when Jehovah chose them for his peculiar people."

In Hosea's relationship with his wife, Gomer is restricted to absolute physical chastity. Not only is she prevented from prostituting herself, but even her lawful husband will not have any sexual relations with her. This restriction has obviously a double meaning as is clear from vs.4: "For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol." It refers to Israel's captivity in which every trace of an independent Israelite civil government is wiped out, and it points to the destruction of the temple, symbolizing the death of spiritual fellowship with God.

The suggestion in this is that God still considered the kingdoms of Israel and Judah to be one people. As far as the Northern Kingdom was concerned, there was no temple, no place of fellowship, to be destroyed. Even during the Babylonian captivity, when the Ten Tribes of Israel had already been dispersed, Ezekiel prophesied: "I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever."<sup>70</sup>

The comparison between sexual immorality and unfaithfulness in fellowship with God is also emphasized by the apostle Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, where we read: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit."<sup>71</sup> Positively, it means that the one form of intimacy reflects the other, as in Paul's words: " 'The two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church."<sup>72</sup>

The promised Messiah is often referred to in Old Testament prophecy as "David." Jeremiah stated: "Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them."<sup>73</sup> And Ezekiel prophesied: "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will

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<sup>68</sup> I Cor. 7:23

<sup>69</sup> Rev. 5:9,10

<sup>70</sup> Ezek. 37:22-25

<sup>71</sup> I Cor. 6:16,17

<sup>72</sup> Eph. 5:31,32

<sup>73</sup> Jer. 30:9

tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.”<sup>74</sup>

“Without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.” The words “without sacrifice” point to the destruction of the temple at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity but they can also be applied to the present time which was inaugurated at the ruin of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. The abolition of the animal sacrifices, which were brought on the altar, emphasizes the all sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for our sin on the cross. We cannot say, however, that at present we live “without sacrifice.” We live with the sacrifice to which all animal sacrifices pointed.

The sacred stones were the Urim and the Thummim, which were instrumental in consulting God for guidance in certain matters. We can say that they symbolized the revelation of the will of God. Their disappearance means that the will of God was no longer done “on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>75</sup> And indeed we cannot say that it was the will of God that He would be silent in this world for an extended period of time. God ceases to speak only when people no longer hear.

The disappearance of the ephod symbolized the disappearance of the priesthood. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains about the ephod: “The ‘ephod’ of the high priest was fastened with a beautifully woven girdle <Exod. 28:27-28> and had shoulder straps set in onyx stones, on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes. Over the chest of the high priest was the breastplate, also containing twelve stones engraved with the tribal names. Rings attached it to the ‘ephod.’ The Urim and Thummim were also linked to the breastplate.”

The only item that does not fit into the series of the temple rituals is the “teraphim,” rendered by the NIV as “idol.” The “death” of the temple and everything connected with it also brought about the death of idol worship, which was Israel’s prevailing sin in Hosea’s day. It was the spiritual adultery which is elaborated on in this book. Death is the wages of sin. God had warned Adam: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”<sup>76</sup> In a way, death is also the only way to restoration of fellowship with God. Our sinful nature dies when we die. And without it no resurrection is possible. In our identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the teraphim vanishes because our deceitful heart, by the grace of which the teraphim existed, has been replaced with the new heart in which the Holy Spirit reigns.

The last sentence of this chapter clearly refers to the last day. “They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.” It will be the day on which Israel and the world will recognize their guilt in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. That is the day about which Zechariah prophesied: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”<sup>77</sup>

<b>II. The Adulterous Israel and Faithful Lord</b>	<b>4:1--14:9</b>
<b>A. The Spiritual Adultery of Israel</b>	<b>4:1--6:3</b>
<b>1. The Sins of Israel</b>	<b>ch. 4</b>
<b>a. Rejection of the Knowledge of God</b>	<b>4:1-10</b>

*1 Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

*2 There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

*3 Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.*

*4 "But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.*

<sup>74</sup> Ezek. 34:23,24

<sup>75</sup> Matt. 6:10

<sup>76</sup> Gen. 2:17

<sup>77</sup> Zech. 12:10

**5 You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother--  
6 my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject  
you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.**

**7 The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for  
something disgraceful.**

**8 They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.**

**9 And it will be: Like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for  
their deeds.**

**10 "They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they  
have deserted the LORD..."**

In this and the following chapters, Gomer and Hosea's relationship in marriage have moved out of the picture. From this place on it is a matter of God versus Israel. The matter is, in fact, presented as if it were a legal case which is brought into court.

The setting is the time that followed the death of King Jeroboam II, which began a time of almost complete anarchy. Zechariah became the king of Israel at the death of his father but he was assassinated in public after a reign of only six months. His assassin, Shallum, became king and held the throne for only one month when he in turn was assassinated by Menahem, who managed to sit on the throne for ten years. Menahem distinguished himself by a reign of cruelty and oppression. During his reign, the power of the Assyrian empire began to make itself felt in Israel, which eventually led to their captivity.

The fact that God takes "the children of Israel" (NIV: "you Israelites") to court makes *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comment: "No allusion is made in this chapter to the King, as there is in <Hos. 5:1>. Thus, as the first three chapters seem to have been written in the reign of Jeroboam II., so this chapter belongs to the period of anarchy which followed on his death. Israel's 'rulers' are spoken of in the plural, <Hos. 4:18>, as though there were no one king at the time."

The Hebrew word that is used to describe the course of action is *riyb*, which means "a legal contest." Evidently, the condition of Israel was not such that God was willing to come to an out of court settlement, as He was in Judah, where Isaiah prophesied: "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'"<sup>78</sup> The country had passed the point of no return in their relationship with God. God's accusation against His people is: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land." The Hebrew word rendered "love" is *chesed*, which is the word, used for a legal marriage relationship. It is the word that describes God's covenant with His people. In the Book of Psalm it is sometimes rendered "lovingkindness" in the older versions, as in: "Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand."<sup>79</sup>

The words faithfulness and love describe the normal condition of a society that acknowledges God in daily life. When recognition of God is absent, cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, and bloodshed prevail. The political scene, as referred to above, reflects the state of the whole nation. What happened at the top permeated the whole of society.

Cursing consists of the use of the Name of God or His acts of salvation without reference to His presence or acknowledgment of His character. The third commandment specifically forbade the misuse of the Name of God: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."<sup>80</sup> The Jews took this injunction so seriously that they even substituted the word "Adonai" for YHWH for fear of misusing it. Evidently, in the Northern Kingdom, no such fear existed and the only reference to God was made in the form of a swearword. The break with the revelation of God, as exemplified in the erection of the calves of Bethel and Dan, ultimately led to "the death of God" in the nation.

When God is absent, truth is absent also. Cursing always goes beyond the misuse of the Name of God; it draws human beings into the sphere of influence of the powers of darkness. Where God is there is blessing, where God is missing, the curse reigns. In differentiating between sins, we tend to grade murder

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<sup>78</sup> Isa. 1:18

<sup>79</sup> Ps. 17:7 (NKJV)

<sup>80</sup> Ex. 20:7

more serious than the lie, but the Bible establishes a direct connection between the two. Jesus calls Satan, in the same breath: “a murderer” and “the father of lies.”<sup>81</sup> “Stealing,” and “adultery” are linked together as if they belong to the same category. Again, we tend to consider the latter more serious than the former. But the last of the Ten Commandments puts them together: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” In the culture of the Stone Age tribes of Irian Jaya, Indonesia, adultery was considered to be a form of theft. After all, in paying a bride price, a man’s wife was his property. In this context, the word “adultery” is probably not used with reference to idolatry as in the previous chapters of this book. It remains true, however, that unfaithfulness in marriage would be non-existent if there is faithfulness in the relationship with God. The physical and emotional can never be fully separated from the spiritual.

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

We must remember that, although sin manifests itself in multiple ways, all sin ultimately makes man fall short of the glory of God. It means failure to hit the mark. How far the goal is missed is of little importance. What difference does it make whether an airplane crashes hundreds of miles from an airport or a few feet from the runway where it is supposed to touch down? It is also good to keep in mind that crimes of a nation are made up of the crimes of its citizens. It is the individual who commits the act that separates him or her from God. Whether, in doing this, man is part of the majority or alone, is not significant.

The sins of a nation transform the country from a land of milk and honey into a desert. God had warned the Israelites about what would happen if they sinned, giving them the example of the Canaanites: “Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.”<sup>82</sup> But God had promised His blessing upon the promised land as a result of obedience. We read: “The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today-- to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul--then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.”<sup>83</sup> Israel’s sin had cancelled this blessing.

The apostle Paul emphasizes that there is a direct link between man’s moral behavior and creation over which God has placed man as a ruler. In the positive context of salvation, he states: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”<sup>84</sup>

We must be careful in our application of the principle. It is fashionable in the United States of America to refer to the blessing of God as the source of its material prosperity. Not all affluence is blessing. We do well to observe the profound wisdom of Agur son of Jakeh, who in an Old Testament context said: “Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> John 8:44

<sup>82</sup> Lev. 18:25,28

<sup>83</sup> Deut. 11:10-15

<sup>84</sup> Rom. 8:19-22

<sup>85</sup> Prov. 30:7-9

*The Adam Clarke Commentary* makes an interesting observation concerning the economic conditions of Great Britain, which was contemporary at the time he wrote it. We quote it because of its interest from the point of a historical perspective: “[The fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.] Those immense shoals which at certain seasons frequent the coasts, which are caught in millions, and become a very useful home supply, and a branch of most profitable traffic, they shall be directed by the unseen influence of God to avoid our coasts, as has frequently been the case with herrings, mackerel, pilchards, etc.; and so this source of supply and wealth has been shut up, because of the iniquities of the land.”

Similar statements could be made in our day. The destruction of the towers of the World Trade Center of New York City on September 11, 2001 was a tremendous tragedy because of the loss of life of the people who were in the buildings as well as of those who were in the airplanes that crashed. I never heard anyone hint to the event as a possible form of God’s displeasure, although, when it happened, the picture of John’s description of the fall of Babylon flashed in my mind. We read in Revelation: “When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’ The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.”<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, although the United States may be less blessed by God than it thinks, there are other nations in the world that are farther advanced on the way of perversion and destruction than this country is. Small comfort!

Vs. 4 seems difficult to interpretation. The NIV reads: “But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.” The words “bring a charge” are the rendering of the same word *riyb* in vs. 1, where the Lord takes Israel as a nation to court. The reference here may be to the corruption of justice to the point that civil suits have become meaningless.

*The Adam Clarke Commentary* observes that, in some manuscripts the word “priest” is lacking and is only “added in the margin by a much later hand.” *The Commentary* states that “the text may be read, ‘And thy people are as rebels.’ ” TLB paraphrases the verse: “Don’t point your finger at someone else and try to pass the blame to him! Look, priest, I am pointing my finger at you.” Some commentaries refer to the law in Deuteronomy that states: “The man who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the LORD your God must be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel.”<sup>87</sup>

Whether “the priest” belongs in this verse or not, we do not know. The general gist seems to be that there is a perversion of justice to the point where the system is used for anything but the punishment of evil and the promotion of good. And if any trace of justice was left, there may have been such a general “contempt of court” that justice had been rendered ineffective.

The fact that in the next verse the prophet is mentioned may shed some light on this verse also. Israel’s spiritual health was determined by the status of the priest and the prophet before God and of the people before the priest and the prophet. It has been stated that the books of I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles can be interpreted in the light of these relationships. The books of Kings evaluate the reign of the kings chronicled according to their relationship with the prophets of their time, whilst the books of Chronicles base their evaluations on the kings’ relationship with the priests. The prophets personified the Word of God. The priests were the mediators between God and the nation in providing atonement for sin and expression of worship. When the prophet failed, the nation starved spiritually, and failure of the priesthood ultimately meant the loss of salvation.

The mention of the mother in vs. 5 and the children in vs. 6 brings us back to Hosea’s unhappy marriage which was the subject of the first three chapters. What hope is there in a family in which the mother is given to immorality? What hope is there for a nation in which motherhood is destroyed? If in a war the men are killed, the nation can survive and recover; if judgment claims the mothers and children, all is lost. The love of God is expressed in a family in the strong protecting love of a father and the warm affection of the mother. When one of the two is lacking, the family is exposed to all sorts of enemy attacks. Fatherly and motherly love cannot survive if the family has no living relationship with the love of God. The perdition of

<sup>86</sup> Rev. 18:9-13

<sup>87</sup> Deut. 17:12



Israel was caused by the breakup of its families. Does this sound familiar to us? Hosea's message has much to say to us in our day.

Vs. 6 reminds us of the fact that Israel as a whole was meant to be a kingdom of priests. God had said to Moses, at the foot of Mount Sinai: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>88</sup> The loss of Israel would mean the perdition to the whole world. But in God's grace, the failure of His people would be turned around and become the salvation of the rest of the world. The apostle Paul touches upon this mystery when he writes in his Epistle to the Romans: "Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!"<sup>89</sup>

God identifies a lack of knowledge as the root of Israel's problem. The Hebrew word for "knowledge" is *yada*, which is the same word used in the name of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." It is a keyword in the Book of Proverbs, as in the verse: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." It is more than ironical that sin, which entered this world through the act of eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil ultimately led to a lack of knowledge. True knowledge is a relationship. True knowledge is the knowledge of the truth. The only knowledge Israel ended up possessing was the knowledge of evil. In following the lies of idolatry, they entered a dead-end street from which there is no return. Knowledge is knowledge of the Word of God in its audible or recorded form. The Word is the vehicle of God's revelation of Himself. The importance of the written Word of God is exemplified in Moses' command to the future kings of Israel. We read: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."<sup>90</sup> What is important to the king is important to the people. The Book of Proverbs states: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law."<sup>91</sup> The ultimate revelation of the Word is our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."<sup>92</sup> Real knowledge is knowing God and knowing God means eternal life. Jesus made this wonderful statement: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."<sup>93</sup>

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments on this point of rejecting the knowledge of God: "Both priests and people rejected knowledge; and justly therefore will God reject them. The reason why the people did not learn, and the priests did not teach, was not because they had not the light, but because they hated it-- not because they had not ways of coming to the knowledge of God and of communicating it, but because they had no heart to it; they rejected it. They desired not the knowledge of God's ways, but put it from them, and shut their eyes against the light; and therefore 'I will also reject thee; I will refuse to take cognizance of thee and to own thee; you will not know me, but bid me depart; I will therefore say, Depart from me, I know you not. Thou shalt be no priest to me.' "

The reference to the children in vs. 6, again brings us back to Hosea's marriage and the birth of Gomer's children who were the fruit of her adulterous affairs. The children that are ignored are Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi. Lack of knowledge caused Israel to break the first two commandments of the Decalogue: "You shall have no other God's before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship

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<sup>88</sup> Ex. 19:5,6

<sup>89</sup> Rom. 11:11,12

<sup>90</sup> Deut. 17:18-20

<sup>91</sup> Prov. 29:18

<sup>92</sup> John 1:14

<sup>93</sup> John 17:3

them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”<sup>94</sup> This was the core of Israel’s spiritual adultery that left them outside the reach of God’s grace and made them non-people in the eyes of God.

The NIV inserts the word “priests” in vs. 7, which is not found in other versions. This is probably done because the context suggests it. It is of little importance to the meaning of the verse, since an increase of the people would, necessarily, mean an increase of the priests and vice versa. Vs. 9 even states clearly: “And it will be: Like people, like priests.”

The accusation against priests and people is that “they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.” Paul defines sin as “fall[ing] short of the glory of God.”<sup>95</sup> Hosea calls it exchanging God’s glory. The psalmist concurs with this by stating about Israel’s idolatry: “They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass. They forgot the God who saved them.”<sup>96</sup> And the apostle Paul uses the same terminology in describing pagan idolatry: “[They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”<sup>97</sup>

The Hebrew word for “glory” is *kabowd*, which literally means “weight” in the figurative sense. It is used of the Shekinah, which accompanied the Israelites while traveling through the desert on their way to the promised land. When Israel grumbled, Moses said: “In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD.”<sup>98</sup> This Hebrew concept of glory is, obviously, behind Paul’s words: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”<sup>99</sup> Glory is substance as opposed to the weightlessness of unrighteousness. Therefore, the psalmist says: “Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.”<sup>100</sup>

The Levitical priests had the legal right to use certain parts of the sin - and guilt offerings brought by the people. The Book of Leviticus states: “The priest who offers it shall eat it; it is to be eaten,” and: “The same law applies to both the sin offering and the guilt offering: They belong to the priest who makes atonement with them.”<sup>101</sup> That which was the law turns against the priests of Israel, first of all, because the priests were not the ones that had been ordained by God. They did not belong to the tribe of Levi. The Book of Second Chronicles records, after the split of Israel into two states: “The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the LORD. And he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made.”<sup>102</sup>

The second reason why that which should have been a holy act of participation in the sacrifice became vulgar indulging was the motivation. The Levitical priests, who legally lived off the rightful share of the sacrifices, were in the paradoxical position of feeding upon sin while being holy. They owed their livelihood to the fact that people are sinners. This contradiction came to a head in the death of Jesus on the cross of Golgotha. Jesus’ crucifixion is the most despicable event that ever happened in the history of mankind, and it is, at the same time, that which constitutes the glory of our salvation. We may glory in the cross, as the apostle Paul did; but if we make light of sin because we think God’s grace is cheap, we vulgarize it. The Israelite priests, not only had no qualms about eating the meat of the sin - and guilt offerings, they actively encouraged the sin of the people in order to increase their meat supply. There was

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<sup>94</sup> Ex. 20:3-6

<sup>95</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>96</sup> Ps. 106:20,21

<sup>97</sup> Rom. 1:23

<sup>98</sup> Ex. 16:7

<sup>99</sup> II Cor. 4:17 (NKJ)

<sup>100</sup> Ps. 1:4

<sup>101</sup> Lev. 6:26; 7:7

<sup>102</sup> II Chr. 11:14,15

nothing holy about their eating. By eating the sin offerings, they did not participate in the atonement but in the sin. Instead of sharing in the people's forgiveness, they shared in their sin. That is why God says: "Like people, like priests."

#### **b. Idolatry of Israel**

4:11-19

*11... to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding  
12 of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.*

*13 They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.*

*14 "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes-- a people without understanding will come to ruin!*

*15 "Though you commit adultery, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. "Do not go to Gilgal; do not go up to Beth Aven. And do not swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives!'*

*16 The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?*

*17 Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!*

*18 Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways.*

*19 A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.*

The terrible punishment God inflicted upon His people consisted in letting them do as they wished. They had engaged upon a dead-end street and God let them go. The increase of the meat supply of the priests did not take away their hunger and the extra-marital affairs of the people did not result in an increase of population.

Their idolatry resulted in having their prayers answered by a stick! We find this kind of divine sarcasm several times in the Bible. Isaiah's powerful indictment of Judah's idolatry reads: "The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.' From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, 'Save me; you are my god.' They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, 'Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?' He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?' „<sup>103</sup>

Jeremiah wrote: "They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!' „<sup>104</sup>

Hosea speaks, both here and in the next chapter, of "a spirit of prostitution." *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* sees in this expression nothing more than a natural inclination toward idolatry, but *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* traces this to "a general disposition on the part of all toward

<sup>103</sup> Isa. 44:12-20

<sup>104</sup> Jer. 2:27

idolatry, instilled, doubtless, into their heart, already so inclined, by an evil spirit from Satan, whose special province it is to foster whoredom and its kindred sins, covetousness and idolatry.”

We know very little about the hierarchy of the kingdom of darkness. It is quite likely that a certain specialization into fields of expertise exists among demons. Some people who are engaged in deliverance ministry may be able to tell us more about this.

If it is true that some sins are committed under the direct influence of demons, that does not take away any personal responsibility of the person who commits the sin. Unless we deal with “the flesh” by surrendering our human nature to the control of the Holy Spirit and by considering ourselves to be crucified with Christ, Satan will have an easy access to our mind and our body. As God’s children, we have the option to be free of demonic influences and to live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Paul expresses this very clearly in his Epistle to the Romans: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”<sup>105</sup>

We understand little of the universal battle that rages in the heavenly places in which we, as human beings, play such an important role. The Book of Job teaches us the deep and important lesson that our human choices are of the greatest importance in the controversy between God and Satan, and that this battle is often in the background of much of our suffering. We are pieces in a universal chess game; but at the same time, we more than mere pawns that are being moved around without any choice or involvement. What God does with and in the lives of His children goes way beyond our personal salvation; we have a part in deciding the outcome of the war.

A spirit of prostitution had overcome Israel because it had willingly surrendered to it. By withdrawing from God’s revelation, which is what Jeroboam I did when he instituted the worship at Bethel, the nation of Israel had come into the camp of God’s enemy.

Man always thinks that, in idolatry, in worshipping the god he made in his own image, he can keep his hands on the controls, but he is wrong. We are never master of our own destiny; once we have determined whom we will serve, we will be bound to the master we have chosen. Those who only want to serve themselves find out that they are slaves to someone else, the one whom Jesus calls him “the strong man.”<sup>106</sup>

The deity worshipped on the high places was probably Asherah, an idol often represented as a tree trunk with branches. The branch was supposed to be the finger of the goddess which predicted the future. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains: “In one of the cuneiform tablets found at Taanach by Dr. Sellin, and written by one Canaanite sheikh to another shortly before the Israelitish invasion of Palestine, reference is made to ‘the finger of Asherah’ from which oracles were derived. The ‘finger’ seems to signify the symbol of the goddess; at any rate it revealed the future by means of a ‘sign and oracle.’ The practice is probably alluded to in <Hos 4:12>.”

The idolatry practiced in the open air was often a form of ritual prostitution. Since prostitution thus became a “spiritual exercise,” it was easily transferred to the home and thus caused the breakup of the family. How could a father, who worshipped Asherah by committing sexual sins, blame his own daughter for turning to prostitution, either in connection with idolatry or for her own gain? And who could blame his daughter-in-law for being unfaithful to his own son? *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “God makes the fathers and husbands’ sin their punishment, by causing it to become the source of dishonor to those whose honor was dearest to them-- their wives and their daughters. Thus, should they be made to feel how bitter a thing it is to have dishonored their Divine Father and Husband. The children inherit the parents’ sin, and are made the parents’ punishers. What you do of your own will, your daughters and wives shall do and suffer against your will.” The old adage remains valid that “the family that prays together stays together.”

Besides the sexual immorality engendered by the idol worship there was the horror of infanticide as part of the cult. Isaiah states: “You burn with lust among the oaks and under every spreading tree; you

<sup>105</sup> Rom. 6:6,7, 11-14

<sup>106</sup> See Matt.12:29

sacrifice your children in the ravines and under the overhanging crags.<sup>107</sup> Even before Israel had entered the promised land, God had warned them against this abomination: “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.”<sup>108</sup>

In vs. 15, Hosea addresses the kingdom of Judah with the warning not to follow the example of the Northern Kingdom. Judah still had the temple worship in Jerusalem and the legally ordained priests formed the bridge of fellowship with God. There may have been a tendency among the people of Judah to go to places like Gilgal, since it was considered a holy place that had value in Israel’s history of the conquest of Canaan. At Gilgal, God had “rolled away the reproach of Egypt” from His people in the performance of a rite of mass circumcision and the celebration of the first Passover feast in the promised land.<sup>109</sup>

In vs. 16, Israel is compared to “a stubborn heifer,” a young bull that has never been broken in. The KJV renders this: “For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer.” The Hebrew word used is *carar*, which means: “to turn away.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* comments profoundly: “In all places the word is used of Israel forsaking Yahweh, and with a reference to the covenant relation between Yahweh and the nation, conceived as a marriage tie which Israel had violated. Yahweh was Israel’s husband, and by her idolatries with other God’s she had proved unfaithful <Jer 3:8,14; 14:7; Hos 14:4>. It may be questioned whether Israel was guilty so much of apostasy and defection, as of failure to grow with the growing revelation of God. The prophets saw that their contemporaries fell far short of their own ideal, but they did not realize how far their predecessors also had fallen short of the rising prophetic standard in ideal and action.”

The NIV renders the last part of the verse like a question with a positive connotation: “How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?” The KJV, however, reads: “Now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place,” which seems to be closer to the meaning of the Hebrew text. Some commentators see in the wording an attempt to irony and a reference to the Assyrian captivity in which Israel was like sheep pasturing in an open field that was too large for the good of the sheep. Whether the words convey compassion or condemnation, we must leave unanswered.

God’s judgment consists in leaving Ephraim to the consequences of its choices, which may be the hardest judgment a human being can ever receive. When the winds of judgment begin to blow it will reveal the weightlessness of sin and idolatry. As the writer of Psalm One states: “Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.”<sup>110</sup> The word “shame” presupposes some moral response to judgment. The person who realizes he does not measure up to the standard of God’s glory, at least has some concept of glory, as well as of the emptiness of his own life.

## 2. Judgment on Israel

5:1-14

**1** *“Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor.*

**2** *The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them.*

**3** *I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt.*

**4** *“Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.*

**5** *Israel’s arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them.*

**6** *When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them.*

**7** *They are unfaithful to the LORD; they give birth to illegitimate children. Now their New Moon festivals will devour them and their fields.*

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<sup>107</sup> Isa. 57:5

<sup>108</sup> Lev. 18:21

<sup>109</sup> Josh. 5:9,11

<sup>110</sup> Ps. 1:4

**8 "Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven; lead on, O Benjamin.**

**9 Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain.**

**10 Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.**

**11 Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols.**

**12 I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah.**

**13 "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores.**

**14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.**

The case against Israel is continued in this chapter and at one point Judah is mentioned as a co-conspirator. The accusation is particularly against those who are in authority: the priests as the spiritual leaders and the royal family for the civil government.

It is difficult to ascertain at what point of Judah's history this prophecy was pronounced. Most of Hosea's prophecy deals with the period in which Ahaz was king of Judah. This particular section may be dated during the reign of Jotham. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about Jotham and Judah's condition during his reign: "Jotham's character is represented in a moderately favorable light... But within the state itself corruption and oppression were rife. The great prophets, Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, exercised their ministries in Jotham's days, and in their pages we have a graphic picture of the moral condition of the time. Isa[iah] does not name Jotham, except in the title (<Isa 1:1>; compare <7:1>), but chapters 1--5 of his book were probably written in this reign. Hosea's writings go back to the last years of Jeroboam II, who died the year Jotham came to the throne. Micah's evidence is valuable, telling us that Omri had formulated and published rules for the cult of the Zidonian Baal, and that these 'statutes' were kept by some of the citizens of Samaria, and, possibly, of Jerusalem <Micah 6:16>." God's displeasure is revealed in the mention of an Assyrian threat against Judah at that point in history. We read in the Book of Second Kings: "In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah."<sup>111</sup>

The names Mizpah and Tabor refer to mountains east and west in the territory of Israel. These were evidently favorite hunting spots, which explains the use of the word "snare" in this context. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states about the sentence "You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor": "As hunters spread their net and snares on the hills Mizpah and Tabor, so ye have snared the people into idolatry, and made them your prey by injustice. As Mizpah and Tabor mean a watch tower and a lofty place (a fit scene for hunters), playing on the words, the prophet implies, in the lofty place in which. I have set you, whereas ye ought to have been the watchers of the people, guarding them from evil, ye have been as hunters entrapping them into it (Jerome). These two places are specified, Mizpah in the east and Tabor in the west, to include the high places throughout the whole kingdom, in which Israel's rulers set up idolatrous altars. Jewish tradition states that liars in wait were set in these two places to intercept and murder those Israelites who would go up to Jerusalem to worship: <Hos. 5:2> favors this." And *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* adds: "Some think it was their practice to set spies in the road, and particularly upon the mountains of Mizpah and Tabor, at the times of the solemn feasts at Jerusalem, to watch if any of their people who were piously affected went thither, and to inform against them, that they might be prosecuted for it, thus doing the devil's work, who disquiets those whom he cannot debauch."

The image of the hunter is continued in the second verse of this chapter. God calls the hunters "rebels," or in Hebrew: *set*, which means "those who depart from what is right." This seems to be the only place in the Old Testament where this word is used. In opposition to those rebels, God places Himself as "the rebuker." The Hebrew reads literally: "And the revoltors are profound to make slaughter, though I have been a rebuker of them all." The word used is *muwcar*, which has the meaning of "chastisement, warning, or instruction." The only thing on the mind of these people was to spill human blood. As we saw before, there was a spirit of anarchy among the leadership of the country, evinced in one coup d'état after another. Evidently, this spirit permeated all of society. The populous had become possessed by a thirst for blood, as

<sup>111</sup> II Kings 15:37

was the case during the French Revolution when the guillotine devoured the heads of hundreds of thousands with the full approval of the masses.

Some of the crimes must have been committed in secret, making the perpetrators believe that they would not be discovered. Gomer may have thought that her husband was unaware of her adulterous affairs. The mention of prostitution in vs. 2 is obviously a reference to the idolatry of which Hosea's marriage problems were an image. The thought that the omniscient God would be unaware of man's actions is, of course, preposterous. Isaiah condemns those who harbor like thoughts: "Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?'"<sup>112</sup> How much more wholesome and realistic are David's reflections on God's omniscience: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."<sup>113</sup>

The spirit of prostitution mentioned in vs. 4 is the same as referred to in the previous chapter (vs. 12). This demonic influence does not allow the people to turn to the Lord. This does not mean that God had blocked the way of repentance to them, or that their sins were so grievous that repentance was impossible. The spirit of prostitution was a lying spirit who whispered to them that God would not take them back if they turned to Him. This contradicts Isaiah's prophecy about the results of repentance: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD."<sup>114</sup> The prodigal son never thought that his father would throw a party to celebrate his return. He merely gambled with the thought that his dad would take him on as a laborer.<sup>115</sup> God's reaction to human repentance has surprised men throughout the ages. Truly, God's thoughts are not our thoughts. People who chafe under the thought that have committed the unpardonable sin do not know God.

The prediction in vs. 5 of Judah's fall seems to indicate that this prophecy is of a later date than the previous chapter. It is not clear whether those who come to seek the Lord with their sacrificial animals are the people of Israel or Judah. If there is continuity with the following verse, the reference is probably to Israel. The mention of illegitimate children brings us back to the picture of Hosea's marriage to Gomer and the birth of Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi.

Instead of "Now their New Moon festivals will devour them and their fields" the NKJ reads: "Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "[Now shall a month devour them] In a month's time the king of Assyria shall be upon them, and oblige them to purchase their lives and liberties by a grievous tax of fifty shekels per head. This Menahem, king of Israel, gave to Pul, king of Assyria, <2 Kings 15:16-20>. Instead of month, some translate the original locust. 'The locusts shall devour them.'" The Scripture reference about Menahem reads: "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. During his entire reign he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. Then Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom. Menahem exacted this money from Israel. Every wealthy man had to contribute fifty shekels of silver to be given to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria withdrew and stayed in the land no longer."<sup>116</sup>

The blowing of the trumpet in Gibeah and Ramah is meant to mobilize the southern kingdom of Judah. Both cities are located in the territory of Benjamin. The prophecy can be interpreted in different ways. It can be taken as a prediction of the coming punishment or it can be seen as a call for moral rearmament. The last few words of this verse are rendered variously in different versions as: "Lead on, O Benjamin"

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<sup>112</sup> Isa. 29:15

<sup>113</sup> Ps. 139:7-12

<sup>114</sup> Isa. 55:6-8

<sup>115</sup> See Luke 15:17-24

<sup>116</sup> II Kings 15:18-20

(NIV), “Look behind you, O Benjamin” (NKJV), “Tremble, O Benjamin” (RSV), or “After Thee, O Benjamin” (KJV). The various readings, of course, change the meaning considerably. It is true that King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them during King Hezekiah’s reign, but Judah was spared at that time because of divine intervention.<sup>117</sup> Judah is, however, included constantly in the prediction of judgment that is coming over the northern kingdom, even though the execution of it would be postponed another century.

Judah is accused of “moving boundary stones.” The expression seems to be proverbial for those who do not respect the inheritance God had given to the people. The reference is to a prohibition in Deuteronomy: “Do not move your neighbor’s boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess.”<sup>118</sup> It speaks of a loss of vision on the promises of God and the possession of the promised land.

Interestingly, God identified Himself with the sin that eats at the heart of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, calling Himself: “a moth to Ephraim” and a “rot to the people of Judah.” The primary meaning of this is, of course, that God allows sin to do its destructive work. In the light of the symbolism of Hosea’s unhappy marriage, the rot of Judah would apply to Israel as well. The Book of Proverbs states: “A disgraceful wife is like decay in [her husband’s] bones.”<sup>119</sup> *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “God becomes a destructive power to the sinner through the thorn of conscience, and the chastisements which are intended to effect his reformation, but which lead inevitably to his ruin when he hardens himself against them. The preaching of the law by the prophets sharpened the thorn in the conscience of Israel and Judah. The chastisement consisted in the infliction of the punishments threatened in the law, viz., in plagues and invasions of their foes.”

But there is a deeper lesson to be drawn from God’s identification with human sin in the meaning of Jesus’ death on the cross. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”<sup>120</sup> This overwhelming element of grace was, of course, well hidden to the people of Hosea’s day, as well as to the prophet himself, but we cannot deny that it is there.

The NIV translates the proper name “King Jareb” as “the great king.” “Jareb” literally means “contender”; it is considered to be a symbolic name for the Assyrian monarch. Hosea’s reference to Ephraim applying to the king of Assyria for help, probably speaks of Pul’s invasion of the northern kingdom and Menahem’s attempt to appease the king. The Scripture record states: “Then Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom. Menahem exacted this money from Israel. Every wealthy man had to contribute fifty shekels of silver to be given to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria withdrew and stayed in the land no longer.”<sup>121</sup> Relief, however, was only temporary because Pul’s successor followed up the invasion, which ultimately led to Israel’s captivity and annihilation. We read: “Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser’s vassal and had paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See II Kings 18:13-19:36

<sup>118</sup> Deut. 19:14

<sup>119</sup> Prov. 12:4<sup>b</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Gal. 3:13,14

<sup>121</sup> II Kings 15:19,20

<sup>122</sup> II Kings 17:3-6



As in Amos' prophecy, God compares Himself to a roaring lion in the exercise of His judgment. In the words of the author of Hebrews: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."<sup>123</sup> This is the other side of the coin in which God took on the form of moth and rot. But, as John discovered, there is also grace in the picture of the lion. We read in Revelation: "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."<sup>124</sup> It all depends on our attitude toward sin and the choices of our life as to whether we see the lion or the lamb in the person of Jesus Christ.

### 3 Eventual Restoration of Israel

5:15--6:3

*15 Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."*

*6:1 "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.*

*2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.*

*3 Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."*

Vs. 15 falls again in the category of "God's wishful thinking" as far as the northern kingdom is concerned. The hoped-for conversion of the ten tribes never took place; the return of Judah from the Babylonian captivity can be seen as only a partial fulfillment of this prophecy. This does not mean, of course, that God's omniscience would be faulty or that there would be some other imperfections in the character of the Almighty. It does reveal, however, that man's lostness affects God deeply. As finite creatures, we cannot understand what it means that, on the level of eternity, God seems to struggle in a way similar to what we do within the limits of life on earth. How can it be that there is sorrow in Him who is the fullness of joy and death in the source of life? We do not know, but we can emphasize and the thought brings God very close to us in our suffering on earth. There are tears in the eyes of the one who promises to wipe away all tears from our eyes.

Israel's condition, when God is through with her, is hopeless. Amos depicts in similar words the state of the nation after God's judgment has swept over it; there is nothing to be saved. We read: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches."<sup>125</sup> If all that is left of a sheep is two leg bones or a piece of an ear it means that the animal is dead. We would consider that healing is out of the question. What a dead body needs is not healing but resurrection.

That brings us to another treasure that is hidden in the field of this prophecy. Who can read words like: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence" without thinking of Him who was restored to life on the third day? I am convinced that Jesus built His conviction about being resurrected on the third day upon this prophecy by Hosea.

When God envisioned the return of His people, He had much more in mind than the homecoming of a few thousand from captivity; He saw the resurrection of His Son and the consequences it would have for the salvation of the world. He saw the defeat of Satan and the victory over death itself. As far as we know, no one ever returned from the Assyrian captivity and the few thousand who came back from Babylonia do not seem to have made a dent in the affairs of this world. Yet in God's hand they became the seed that would fill the field of this world with a rich harvest for eternity. Those who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple did so much more than they knew. God's "wishful thinking" was no pipe dream.

In the light of this truth, we may have hope for the most ruined life and for the heart that is broken beyond hope. If God can take two leg bones and the piece of an ear and make a new animal out of it, there is

<sup>123</sup> Heb. 10:31

<sup>124</sup> Rev. 5:5,6

<sup>125</sup> Amos 3:12

no limit to what may happen. Those of Israel who decided to acknowledge Him, found out that God's response was as certain as the rising of the sun and the return of the seasons.

One wonders what these words must have meant to Hosea when he considered the condition of his tragic marriage and the brokenness of his family. If he understood what God was saying through him, he must have experienced hope and healing.

The Hebrew word, rendered by the NIV as "acknowledge" is *yada`*, which means, "to know," "to ascertain by seeing," or "to know by experiencing." The word is used almost 1000 times in the Hebrew Bible. One of the most typical verses in which we find it in the latter meaning is: "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' 'because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD."<sup>126</sup> *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains about this word: "In contrast to this knowing through reflection is the knowing which comes through experience with the senses, by investigation and proving, by reflection and consideration (firsthand knowing). Consequently *yada`* is used in synonymous parallelism with 'hear' Ex 3:7, 'see' Gen 18:21, and 'perceive, see' Job 28:7. Joseph told his brothers that were they to leave one of their number with him in Egypt then he would 'know,' by experience, that they were honest men (Gen 42:33). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree whose fruit if eaten would give them the experience of evil and, therefore, the knowledge of both good and evil. Somewhat characteristically the heart plays an important role in knowing. Because they experienced the sustaining presence of God during the wilderness wandering, the Israelites 'knew' in their hearts that God was disciplining or caring for them as a father cares for a son Deut 8:5. Such knowing can be hindered by a wrongly disposed heart Ps 95:10." Consequently, the words "Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him" may be interpreted as meaning: "experiencing God."

## **B. The Refusal of Israel to Repent of Its Adultery 6:4--8:14**

### **1. Willful Transgression of the Covenant 6:4-11**

*4 "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.*

*5 Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.*

*6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

*7 Like Adam, they have broken the covenant- they were unfaithful to me there.*

*8 Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood.*

*9 As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes.*

*10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. There Ephraim is given to prostitution and Israel is defiled.*

*11 "Also for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed. "Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people...*

Again, God's inner conflict is expressed in the question: "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah?" It is as if God says to His children: "You be the judge. What would you do in my place?" In view of the coming judgment, nothing is spiritually so healthy for us as to look at our lives from God's perspective, supposing that we can do that without bias. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Speaking after the manner of men, the justice and mercy of God seem puzzled how to act toward them. When justice was about to destroy them for their iniquity, it was prevented by their repentance and contrition; when mercy was about to pour upon them as penitents its choicest blessings, it was prevented by their fickleness and relapse! These things induce the just and merciful God to exclaim, 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?' The only thing that could be done in such a case was that which God did."

The picture that represents the essence of Israel's resolution to repent is vapor, which is the least substantial of all matter. It is the opposite of faith, of which the author of the Hebrew Epistle states: "Now

<sup>126</sup> Jer. 31:34

faith is the substance of things hoped for.”<sup>127</sup> The picture clearly illustrates that man’s determination in itself is not enough to break the bondage of sin. Jesus emphasized this when He said to the Jews: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”<sup>128</sup> He is the only one who was able to tie up the strong man and rob him, and thus break the power of Satan in the life of the individual.<sup>129</sup>

Yet in these words of Hosea, God seems to appeal to the human volition to turn to Him. He wants us to discover how “vaporous” our own good intentions are and that, without the power of the Holy Spirit and the penetration of His Word in our lives, we will remain under the dominion of sin.

People were physically killed in the siege of Samaria and the deportation of the nation, but the real killing is spiritual through the Word of God. This is the meaning of the words: “Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth.” When John sees the risen Lord in His glory in his opening vision in Revelation, he states: “Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.”<sup>130</sup> The Word of God is the ultimate killer, unless we subject to its surgical penetration before judgments catches up with us. In the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”<sup>131</sup> As the Word of God is the agency of creation, it is also the means of judgment.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus twice quotes Hosea’s words: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”<sup>132</sup> Once the quotation is in the context of the Pharisees’ criticism of Jesus holding company with tax collectors and prostitutes and once when they condemned the disciples who picked grains of wheat on the Sabbath. The words do not mean, of course, that God did not want people to bring sacrifices, particularly burnt offerings, but that, without mercy, those sacrifices were meaningless, particularly the burnt offerings, which are a supreme expression of love for God. The Hebrew word for “mercy” here is *checed*, which can be rendered: “kindness,” or “mercy.” It is the word that is most used to express God’s covenant love for His people, as in the verse: “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.”<sup>133</sup> If we open ourselves to God’s lovingkindness, He imparts this love to us so that we not only partake of it but emulate it. People, throughout the ages however, have found it easier to resort to bringing sacrifices than to expose themselves to the love of God and be transformed by it.

Hosea, more than any other prophet, reveals some things about the ancient history of revelation in a way that throws a new light on some of its vital characters. In vs. 7 of this chapter it is Adam; later we will see some more interesting details about Jacob.<sup>134</sup>

Some of the older versions, including the NKJV, render “like Adam”: “like men.” The RSV translates it as if it is the name of a place: “At Adam.” Most modern translations, however, take the words to be a reference to Adam, the father of the human race.

*Barnes’ Notes* observes: “As Adam our first parent, in Paradise, not out of any pressure, but wantonly, through self-will and pride, broke the covenant of God, eating the forbidden fruit, and then defended himself in his sin against God, casting the blame upon the woman: so these, in the good land which God had given them, ‘that they should’ therein ‘keep His covenant and observe His laws’ (Ps 105:44), wantonly and petulantly broke that covenant; and then obstinately defended their sin. Wherefore, as Adam was cast out of Paradise, so shall these be cast out of the land of promise.” The Genesis record does not

<sup>127</sup> Heb. 11:1 (KJV)

<sup>128</sup> John 8:34-37

<sup>129</sup> See Matt. 12:29

<sup>130</sup> Rev. 1:16

<sup>131</sup> Heb. 4:12,13

<sup>132</sup> Matt. 9:13;12:7

<sup>133</sup> Ps. 63:3 (KJV)

<sup>134</sup> ch. 12:4

mention a covenant between God and Adam. Since the Holy Spirit uses the word here, we understand that the text: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’ ”<sup>135</sup> constitute more than merely a work order and a prohibition. Adam, so to speak, signed his name to a contract. The words: “[God] brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.” This constitutes the carrying out of the responsibility Adam had agreed to assume in working and taking care of God’s garden. When Adam sinned, he knowingly tore up the contract. The reference to Adam also throws light on the relationship between husband and wife as a physical and emotional expression of man’s spiritual relationship with God. Hosea’s unhappy family life had conditioned him to fully understand and deeply feel what God was saying here. When sin entered the world, Adam and Eve put on masks in front of each other to cover the nakedness of their soul. Israel wore a mask in her relationship with God. The people probably thought that they were the honest and openhearted ones and that it was God who wore the mask.

The reference to Gilead as “a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood” is open to various interpretations. Hosea’s language is rather compact at this point. Gilead is the name of the territory situated east of the Jordan River. As far as we know, there is no city by that name. Joshua appointed Ramoth in Gilead as a city of refuge for people accused of murder.<sup>136</sup> There may be a reference to the complicity of the people of Gilead in the murder of King Pekahiah by Pekah. We read: “Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he assassinated Pekahiah, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah killed Pekahiah and succeeded him as king.”<sup>137</sup> Some commentators believe that some of the priests lay in wait for pilgrims who were on their way to Jerusalem and assassinated them at this place, or that accused murderers were killed before they could reach the city limits of Ramah where they could find asylum.

The KJV renders “they murder on the road to Shechem” as “the company of priests murder in the way by consent.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* reads here the word “shekem,” which can be rendered “consent,” or “shoulder.” *The Commentary* states: “The image is from oxen putting their shoulders together to pull the same yoke.”

God says: “I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel.” The Hebrew word, rendered: “horrible thing” is *sha` aruwrah*, which literally means: “something that makes one shudder.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “In another nation, idolatry was error. In Israel, which had the knowledge of the one true God and had received the law, it was horror.” God’s reaction to human corruption is put anthropomorphically as “shuddering.” As human beings, we cannot imagine that the eternal God of glory would shudder like a fearful creature. Yet the expression conveys powerfully what God experiences in regard to our sin.

As in the previous chapter, Judah is included in the text. It is as if God raises a warning finger at the southern kingdom to let them know that what is going to happen in the north will happen to them also if they do not repent. The mention of Judah’s harvest reminds us of John’s great vision in Revelation. We read: “I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed

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<sup>135</sup> Gen. 2:15-17

<sup>136</sup> See Jos. 21:38

<sup>137</sup> II Kings 15:25

out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."<sup>138</sup> And we know that the winepress that was trod outside the city is the hill of Golgotha from where the blood of the Lamb covers the whole earth.

The division between the chapters is, obviously, done arbitrarily. The last part of vs. 11 belongs to the next chapter.

## **2. Willful Refusal to Return to the Lord 7:1-16**

*1 ...whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed. They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets;*

*2 but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.*

*3 "They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies.*

*4 They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises.*

*5 On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers.*

*6 Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.*

*7 All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them calls on me.*

*8 "Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over.*

*9 Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realize it. His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice.*

*10 Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him.*

*11 "Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless- now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria.*

*12 When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.*

*13 Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me.*

*14 They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds. They gather together for grain and new wine but turn away from me.*

*15 I trained them and strengthened them, but they plot evil against me.*

*16 They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.*

The last words of the previous chapter should be inserted at the beginning of vs. 1, reading –“Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* introduces this chapter: “This chapter may be divided into three sections. In the first section, including vers. 1-7, the prophet reproves with much but deserved severity the depraved morals of king and princes. In the second section, consisting of vers. 8-11, he rebukes their sinfulness, silliness, pride, and stupid obstinacy, notwithstanding the many manifest tokens of decay. Otherwise the first section deals with the internal corruption of the northern kingdom, and the second exposes their sinful and harmful foreign policy. The third section, continuing from the twelfth verse to the end of the chapter, that is, vers. 12-16, threatens the infliction of punishment incurred by their gross wicked.”

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* suggests that this prophecy was: “Probably delivered in the interreign and civil war at Pekah's death; for Hos 7:7, ‘all their kings are fallen,’ refers to the murder of Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah; in Hos 7:8, ‘Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people,’ the reference seems to be to Menahem's payment of tribute to Pul, in order to secure himself in the usurped throne, also to Pekah's league with Rezin of Syria, and to Hoshea's connection with

<sup>138</sup> Rev. 14:14-20

Assyria during the interreign at Pekah's death." The regicide at the top created a condition of anarchy among the people. Where crime dwells in the royal palace and in the government offices, the streets of the cities are no longer safe. Assault, robbery, and murder had become common phenomena in the cities of Israel. I am writing these words on the campus of the International Christian Academy of Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, where a few days earlier a band of armed robbers came in to steal, and taking one of the missionaries hostage, killing one of the guards. Côte d'Ivoire used to have the reputation of being one of the safest and most stable countries of West Africa. In the same way Israel was no longer a safe place to live.

Yet, God still speaks of healing, although the patient seems to be beyond hope. The only hopeless case is the one of the sinner who refuses to confess and repent. No sin is beyond the point of forgiveness and no time for confession is too late. As long as there is breath in a human being, there is hope. One of the criminals who was crucified next to Jesus said: " 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' " Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.' "<sup>139</sup> But as God touches Ephraim for healing, another abscess breaks open.

The stupidity of the sinner is evinced in the fact that he denies God's omniscience. Asaph speaks of people who say: "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?"<sup>140</sup> And King Solomon answers in the Book of Proverbs: "A man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths."<sup>141</sup> He who thinks differently is a fool.

In verses 4-7 of this chapter, Hosea compares his compatriots with the fire in an oven. He uses the word three times in this short section. Their fire does not even need to be tended; it keeps on burning of its own. The first application of the image is to the sexual lust that makes men into adulterers, both physically and spiritually. As they break faith with their legal wives and lust after other women, so they break fellowship with God in idolatry. The focus is here not on Gomer, but on her lovers. The fact that God created man's sexuality as an image of fellowship with Himself has puzzled mankind over the centuries. Many people still do not know what to do with Paul's comparison in Ephesians, which says the sexual union in a marriage relation reflects the mystery of Christ and the church.<sup>142</sup> Somehow, Satan has found an easy access in this part of human behavior and has entrenched himself more deeply in it than in any other domain. The practice of cultic prostitution in the worship of idols gave a "spiritual" cachet to the act, making a foul caricature of what God intended it to be. There is quite a bit of difference of opinion among scholars about the correct reading of this section. The Septuagint renders vs. 4: "They are all adulterers, as an oven glowing from flame for hot-baking, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened."

Another aspect of the image of the oven, particularly in the Baal worship, was the human sacrifices that were brought. In the cult, mostly infants were thrown into the idol's flaming mouth. But Hosea turns the image around and sees how the fiery crater of the idol's mouth devours the judges and the kings. The image is concise but very powerful; justice itself is being burnt up and the coup d'états that occurred at the time of this prophecy are pictured in the burning up of the kings.

Many scholars consider vs. 6 the most difficult verse, in terms of interpretation, in the whole book. The verse is rendered differently in various translations. The NKJV reads: "They prepare their heart like an oven, While they lie in wait; Their baker sleeps all night; In the morning it burns like a flaming fire." TLB paraphrases: "Their hearts blaze like a furnace with intrigue. Their plot smolders through the night, and in the morning it flames forth like raging fire." RSV renders it: "For like an oven their hearts burn with intrigue; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire." *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Wunsche, who states: "The meaning... is that all, scoffers and king alike, press near each other, being of one heart and disposition; cunning makes them one single society."

God expects some of the people of the nation and some of those in authority to cry out to Him for a solution to the anarchy, but evidently prayer has been abolished. No one even thinks of turning to the Lord to seek a way out of the chaos. The people of Israel believe that the only answer is a political one.

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<sup>139</sup> Luke 23:42,43

<sup>140</sup> Ps. 73:11

<sup>141</sup> Prov. 5:21

<sup>142</sup> See Eph. 5:31,32

The best commentary on vs. 8 is found in the Psalms where we read: “They mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.”<sup>143</sup>

On the picture of the flat cake that is burnt on one side and uncooked on the other, *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The second clause is well explained by Bishop Horsley as follows: ‘One thing on one side, another on the other; burnt to a coal at bottom, raw dough at the top. An apt image of a character that is all inconsistencies. Such were the ten tribes of the prophet’s day; worshippers of Jehovah in profession, but adopting all the idolatries of the neighboring nations, in addition to their own semi-idolatry of the calves.’ Similarly, the Geneva Bible has, ‘Baked on one side and raw on the other, he is neither through hot nor through cold, but partly a Jew and partly a Gentile.’ ”

The people of Israel did not understand what they were doing and what disastrous effects their acts would have. They believed themselves to be clever politicians, who were good in playing the game of international politics, but they did not realize that they were the victims of international intrigue. The leaders of Israel made a pact with Egypt to protect them against Assyria and they sought Assyria’s help for protection against Egypt. This is best illustrated in the experience of King Menahem, of whom we read: “Then Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom. Menahem exacted this money from Israel. Every wealthy man had to contribute fifty shekels of silver to be given to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria withdrew and stayed in the land no longer.”<sup>144</sup> In all this they acted like an old person, suffering from dementia. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* makes the observation: “The kingdom is grown old in iniquity; the time of their captivity is at hand, and they are apprehensive of no danger. They are in the state of a silly old man, who through age and infirmities is become nearly bald, and the few remaining hairs on his head are quite gray. But he does not consider his latter end; is making no provision for that eternity on the brink of which he is constantly standing; does not apply to the sovereign Physician to heal his spiritual diseases; but calls in the doctors to cure him of old age and death! This miserable state and preposterous conduct we witness every day.”

Instead of the NIV’s reading: “Israel’s arrogance testifies against him,” the KJV reads: “And the pride of Israel testified to his face.” Some scholars interpret the Hebrew word *ga’own* as referring to the majesty of God. It has the double meaning of “arrogance,” and “excellency.” In the latter sense it is used in the Song of Moses: “In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.”<sup>145</sup> We find the opposite meaning in God’s warning to the people in Leviticus: “I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.”<sup>146</sup>

Israel’s foreign policy is presented in the form of the behavior of a dove. An Eastern proverb states: “There is nothing simpler than a dove.” The dove is represented in Scripture both in a favorable and an unfavorable light. Noah immortalized the dove as a symbol of peace by letting it out of the ark. When the dove came back with an olive branch in its beak, Noah concluded that the earth was again fit for habitation.<sup>147</sup> Jesus said to His disciples: “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”<sup>148</sup> There are, however, instances in which innocence is not commendable. If the leaders of a nation think themselves to be shrewd in international politics and approach their problems with the innocence of a dove, they are more than simple-minded. What Jesus recommended His disciples to do, was not to try to match their own wits with the craftiness of Satan, but to rely on a wisdom that was not their own. For one to operate with a bird brain and believe himself to be smarter than the rest leads to inevitable disaster. This was Israel’s attitude. In the words of *The Jamieson, Fausset, and*

<sup>143</sup> Ps. 106:35,36, 39

<sup>144</sup> II Kings 15:19,20

<sup>145</sup> Ex. 15:7

<sup>146</sup> Lev. 26:19

<sup>147</sup> See Gen. 8:8-12

<sup>148</sup> Matt. 10:16

*Brown Commentary*: “As the dove betrays its silliness by fleeing in alarm from its nest, only to fall into the net of the fowler, so Israel, though warned that foreign alliances would be her ruin, rushed into them.”

The only true wisdom is in the fear of the Lord. This principle operates equally well in private lives as in the international affairs of nations. God pronounced His “woe” upon Israel for abandoning this principle. Their rebellion against God would cost them their lives. At the same time, we read God’s cry of compassion in the words: “I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me.” We cannot read these words without remembering Jesus’ cry: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”<sup>149</sup> Israel’s speaking of lies against their Redeemer here predicts what would happen during the court case of Jesus, where we read: “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.”<sup>150</sup>

Scholars differ in opinion about the meaning of the words: “They gather together for grain and new wine but turn away from me.” One interpretation reads: “As enthusiasts and fanatics making incisions with steel in their breasts and both hands, and absurdly all but shedding in sacrifice their own blood, perhaps to graven images.” *The Pulpit Commentary*, however, states: “The common reading and rendering are clearly preferable; Kimchi’s exposition is in harmony therewith: ‘When corn or new wine comes into the city for sale, they all assemble at (or, round) it on account of the famine which is in the city; and yet they fall away from me.’”

The wording is very suggestive: “They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds.” The prayer made upon the bed suggests privacy, which could indicate an intimate relationship in prayer, like the prayer Jesus recommends in The Sermon on the Mount: “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”<sup>151</sup> But the fact that their hearts are not involved in it cancels out this meaning. To “wail” is making an animal sound. The Hebrew word *yalal* means: “to howl.” Intimacy of fellowship with God is not what is meant here, in spite of its vague resemblance.

God’s training of His people is met with hostility. The training probably refers to the giving of the law, and the hostility points to what God’s people did to Him when He came down to live among them in the person of Jesus Christ. In the words of the apostle John: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”<sup>152</sup>

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* makes an interesting statement about the “faulty bow”: “[They are like a deceitful bow] Which, when it is reflexed, in order to be strung, suddenly springs back into its quiescent curve; for the eastern bows stand in their quiescent state in a curve, something like ^; and in order to be strung must be bended back in the opposite direction. This bending of the bow requires both strength and skill; and if not properly done, it will fly back, and regain its former position; and in this recoil endanger the archer-may even break an arm. I have been in this danger myself in bending the Asiatic bow. For want of this knowledge not one commentator has hit the meaning of the passage.” The condition of the bow causes the shooter to miss the mark, which conveys the meaning of Greek word *hamartano*, which is translated “to sin.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The silliness of the dove, with which the stupidity of Ephraim is compared, is not manifested by its missing its nest and resting-place, and then helplessly fluttering about, according to Ewald; nor by its falling into the net of the bird-catcher in its effort to escape from the hawk, according to Hitzig; nor by its neither grieving nor searching for its young when it is robbed of them, according to Jerome; nor by its becoming dejected or devoid of consideration when it has lost its young, according to the Targum; but by its flying right into the net of the bird-catcher, without suspecting or observing it in its search for food, according to Rosenmüller. Thus Kimchi explains it: ‘The prophet compares Ephraim to a dove which gets caught in a net owing to its simplicity, because it has no sense to perceive that, when it goes to gather grains of corn, a net is spread there to catch it. So Ephraim, when they

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<sup>149</sup> Luke 13:34

<sup>150</sup> Mark 14:55,56

<sup>151</sup> Matt. 6:6

<sup>152</sup> John 1:11



went and asked help from Assyria or from Egypt, (did not perceive) that they went to their hurt, when they sought help from the foreign nations and not from God — blessed be he! — in whose hand all is. And he mentions the dove, though it is the manner of other birds, because the dove has no bitterness, as if it went in simplicity and without apprehension of the evil that would come upon it.’ ”

The NIV reads: “Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words.” The KJV renders this: “Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue.” The Hebrew word for “rage” is *za`am*, which usually refers to the wrath of God, as in: “Because of your wrath there is no health in my body.”<sup>153</sup> The sword is used in Scripture as an image of the Word of God. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”<sup>154</sup> In Revelation, John sees the Word of God as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth: “In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” And: “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.”<sup>155</sup> Isaiah compares the prophetic Word God had given him to a sword: “He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.”<sup>156</sup> Man’s word is also likened in Proverbs to a sword that causes harm: “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”<sup>157</sup> In Hosea’s verse, the roles are reversed: the wrath of man is directed toward God and the Word of God is directed to man in judgment of man’s sin.

The final blow to Israel’s dignity is found in the words: “For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.” They thought they were shrewd in entering into alliances with Egypt and Assyria. The Egyptians, who did not know God, saw through their cleverness and were amused.

### 3. Willful Idolatry

8:1-14

***1 "Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.***

***2 Israel cries out to me, `O our God, we acknowledge you!"***

***3 But Israel has rejected what is good; an enemy will pursue him.***

***4 They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.***

***5 Throw out your calf-idol, O Samaria! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity?***

***6 They are from Israel! This calf-a craftsman has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria.***

***7 "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.***

***8 Israel is swallowed up; now she is among the nations like a worthless thing.***

***9 For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers.***

***10 Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king.***

***11 "Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning.***

***12 I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien.***

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<sup>153</sup> Ps. 38:3

<sup>154</sup> Heb. 4:12

<sup>155</sup> Rev. 1:16; 19:15

<sup>156</sup> Isa. 49:2

<sup>157</sup> Prov. 12:18

***13 They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat, but the LORD is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt.***

***14 Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; Judah has fortified many towns. But I will send fire upon their cities that will consume their fortresses."***

The images Hosea uses in this chapter almost tumble over each other. Some are stated so briefly that they must be separated from the others to understand their meaning. God orders the prophet: "Put the trumpet to your lips!" The Hebrew sounds even more like the barking of a military command: "Trumpet to your mouth!" Hosea's prophecy is like the sounding of a trumpet by the watchman of a city who sees the approach of the enemy. God says through Isaiah: "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night."<sup>158</sup> Amos combines these same elements, saying: "When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets."<sup>159</sup> God's Word is like a wake-up call to avert total disaster. In this case it went unheeded.

The eagle in this verse, undoubtedly, refers to Assyria whose king, Shalmaneser, led the northern kingdom into captivity. It is interesting to see how this bird has symbolized powerful nations throughout the ages. King Nebuchadnezzar is also compared to an eagle in Scriptures. We read about him in Ezekiel: "Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon.'" "Say to this rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say to them: 'The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and carried off her king and her nobles, bringing them back with him to Babylon.'"<sup>160</sup> Evidently, the American Eagle is not the first bird to represent a powerful nation.

The eagle "is over the house of the LORD," which in this case is the northern kingdom of Israel. That is, in itself, a remarkable statement. The words "the house of the LORD" usually refers to the temple in Jerusalem. But when God gave testimony about the character of Moses, He said: "he is faithful in all my house."<sup>161</sup> In that context, the house of the LORD is, obviously, the whole nation of Israel. In spite of the fact that Israel had separated herself from God's revelation of Himself in Jerusalem, they were still considered to be "the house of the LORD," leaving the door open to return.

God would allow the eagle to swoop down upon them because they had broken the covenant and rebelled against His law. The first clause refers to their leaving of the foundation and the second to the practical outcome in a life of corrupt actions. God wanted His people to understand that their breaking fellowship with Him left them vulnerable to the powers of darkness. This implies that a restoration of fellowship through confession and repentance could yet avert the deadly danger.

Earlier, the coming captivity was likened to the net of a bird catcher; here it is depicted as the swooping down upon them of a powerful bird of prey. David testifies in one of the psalms that God can deliver from this kind of danger: "Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped."<sup>162</sup> Those words were written centuries before Israel was led away, but they were probably forgotten.

The NIV modifies the reading of the original in vs. 2: "Israel cries out to me, 'O our God, we acknowledge you!'" The Hebrew text reads literally: "Unto me shall cry, 'My God, we, Israel, know Thee.'" The personal pronoun in the first singular makes it a cry of individuals who claim to know God on the basis of being a member of the nation of Israel. This is an example of the proverb that states that "Need teaches prayer." In the nation of Indonesia, we met people who would make similar claims. The Batak people from the island of Sumatra, which is predominantly Muslim, would say: "I am a Batak, I am a Christian." The concept of a "Christian nation" has well nigh disappeared in our time. But we know that people still claim to be Christian because they belong to a certain group, not because of a born-again experience. Jesus says that

<sup>158</sup> Isa. 62:6

<sup>159</sup> Amos 3:6,7

<sup>160</sup> Ezek 17:3,12

<sup>161</sup> Num.12:7

<sup>162</sup> Ps. 124:6,7

those who know Him intimately will be spared on the day of judgment: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."<sup>163</sup> But a confession consisting of mere words will protect against nothing. At another occasion our Lord said: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"<sup>164</sup> Paul speaks about some people who: "Claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him."<sup>165</sup> And in Isaiah we read: "The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'"<sup>166</sup> *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "There are many who in works deny God, and disown him, yet, to serve a turn, will profess that they know him, that they know more of him than some of their neighbors do. But what stead will it stand a man in to be able to say, 'My God, I know thee,' when he cannot say, 'My God, I love thee,' and 'My God, I serve thee, and cleave to thee only?'"

The statement: "They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval" is interpreted by some scholars to mean that the whole existence of the northern kingdom was not according to the will of God. The Book of First Kings clearly contradicts this. When the schism took place, we read: "About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. Then he said to Jeroboam, 'Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe.'"<sup>167</sup> The division of the kingdom was clearly God's doing. But that does not mean that the series of assassinations that ended the lives of some of the kings was according to His will. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "During 253 years, for which the kingdom of Israel lasted eighteen kings reigned over it, out of ten different families, and no family came to a close, save by a violent death." The reference of this verse is to this kind of anarchy.

The second part of vs. 4 through the end of vs. 6 states the major cause of Israel's destruction: their idolatry, under the guise of service of YHWH. If the nation would rid themselves of their idols and turn with their heart to the Lord, disaster at this point could still have been avoided. Israel had a historical precedent that could have taught them what to do with idols in the form of a calf. The Scriptures recorded Moses' reaction to Israel's idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai: "When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it."<sup>168</sup>

The words: "Throw out your calf-idol, O Samaria!" are variously rendered: "Your calf is rejected, O Samaria!" (NKJV), "He has rejected your calf, O Samaria" (NASU), "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off (KJV), "O Samaria, I reject this calf-this idol you have made" (TLB), or "I have spurned your calf, O Sama'ria" (RSV). The meaning is basically the same, but it seems more logical to interpret this to mean that the people must reject the idol. That God would reject it is self-evident.

The fact that an idol is manmade makes that it can never be a god. God created man, not man God. Man's condition on earth would be hopeless if this were not so. Actually, the hopelessness of man is due to this mistaken belief. *The Pulpit Commentary* emphasizes another meaning of the text: "This idol was of home manufacture, not imported from abroad, as Baal and Ashtaroth from the Sidonians, Chemosh from the Moabites, and Moloch from the Ammonites. The Israelites themselves and their king Jeroboam made for the

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<sup>163</sup> John 5:24

<sup>164</sup> Matt. 7:22,23

<sup>165</sup> Titus 1:16

<sup>166</sup> Isa. 29:13

<sup>167</sup> I Kings 11:29-33

<sup>168</sup> Ex. 32:19,20

northern kingdom what had been learnt in Egypt. Thus Israel's god was a creature of Israel's own devising. How stupid and how absurd! Israel's god man-made, how enormous and abominable the iniquity!"

For: "How long will they be incapable of purity?" TLB reads: "How long will it be before one honest man is found among you?" The Hebrew word, rendered "purity" is *niqqayown*, meaning: "clearness." The word comes from *naqah*, "to be pure," or "innocent." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: "Only in Hebrew does this verb mean 'being innocent.' In Aramaic and Arabic it occurs with the meaning of being 'clean.' " The use of the word in this context suggests that God considers a person innocent, or guiltless if he keeps clear of idolatry and puts his trust in God alone. In God's dealing with Abraham, we read: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."<sup>169</sup> This indicates that this is a general principle that governs God's attitude to all who put their faith in Him. No one is capable of purity, unless God's credits it to him.

The words: "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" were, evidently, a proverb. "Wind" here has no spiritual significance, although the word *ruwach* is sometimes used for "spirit," as in the verse: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."<sup>170</sup> The wind may be empty, but the whirlwind is destructive. The harvest of sowing emptiness is not more emptiness but ruin. The parallel part of the verse: "The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour" is not a parallel in the strict sense of the word, but it is sufficiently expressive. Where there is no harvest, people will starve to death. *The Pulpit Commentary* brings out the hidden beauty of Hosea's words: "Here the play on words, of which the Hebrews were so fond, is obvious — the *tse-roach* has no *yemach*; the halm has no maim; the *Spross* no *Schoss*; the corn no kern." *Barnes' Notes* adds to this: "Thus they 'reaped the whirlwind,' yea, (as the word means) 'a mighty whirlwind.' But the whirlwind which they reap doth not belong to 'them'; rather they belong to it, blown away by it, like chaff, the sport and mockery of its restless violence."

The picture Hosea paints is a very graphic one. The coarse style enhances the power of his words. The wind they sow is the product of the emptiness of their own hearts. The Bible depicts people who are blown away as wicked. The First Psalm compares the righteous to a tree, planted by streams of water, that produces fruit. But, the psalm states: "Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away."<sup>171</sup> The souls of men will only be able to withstand the storm if they are weighed down by the glory of God. The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."<sup>172</sup>

In beautiful inconsistency, the prophet theorizes that some stalks would produce grain but this will not mean that the one who sowed would be fed with it. The land would be invaded and the invader would take away the crop, leaving the population to starve to death. Israel had had enough of such experiences in her past. We read that, in the days of Gideon: "Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it."<sup>173</sup>

Invaders would not only swallow up Israel's harvest, they would devour the people also. In the Assyrian captivity, Israel would lose her identity as a nation. The Hebrew text uses the word *keliy*, which the KJV translates: "vessel." It is a generic word with a wide variety of meaning. In some contexts it is rendered "jewel," as in: "And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things."<sup>174</sup> In other places it simply means: "stuff," as in Jacob's reproach to Laban: "Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou

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<sup>169</sup> Gen. 15:6

<sup>170</sup> Gen. 1:2

<sup>171</sup> Ps. 1:4

<sup>172</sup> II Cor. 4:17 (KJV)

<sup>173</sup> Judg. 6:3-5

<sup>174</sup> Gen. 24:53 (KJV)

found of all thy household stuff?”<sup>175</sup> “A worthless jewel” is still worthless, although the words evoke thoughts of what could have been valuable.

The statement “For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone” clearly refers to Menahem’s dealings with King Pul of Assyria, mentioned earlier.<sup>176</sup> “Wild donkey” is the translation of the Hebrew word *pere*, which means “running wild.” Speaking about Ishmael, God said: “He will be a wild donkey of a man.”<sup>177</sup> Most scholars see here a comparison between the stubbornness of a wild donkey and Ephraim’s stupidity. Others see Ephraim contrasted to an animal that is proverbial for its stupidity, making Israel more stupid than a jackass. The implication then is that Menahem’s covenant with the Assyrians is the stupidest thing anyone could do. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* comments: “The thought is rather this: whilst even a wild ass, that stupid animal, keeps by itself to maintain its independence, Ephraim tries to form unnatural alliances with the nations of the world, that is to say, alliances that are quite incompatible with its vocation.”

As a parallel to this interpretation, we find again the picture of the prostitute. The common procedure in prostitution is that a man pays a woman for her sexual services. Ephraim’s prostitution distinguishes itself by reversing the roles and paying her lovers for the services she provides. This unnatural behavior makes her immorality even more depraved. The pictures clearly display God’s disgust about the people He loves so deeply. Hosea’s pain about his own unhappy marriage is again brought home forcefully.

The words: “I will now gather them together” in vs. 10 cannot logically be applied to a return from Israel’s captivity. First of all, the context does not allow this, and historically it never happened. The gathering together, therefore, must apply to the nations whose favor Ephraim has courted. God gathers them together for the kill. Ezekiel pronounced a similar prophecy about the southern kingdom: “Therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and will strip you in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness. I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger. Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare. They will bring a mob against you, who will stone you and hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and inflict punishment on you in the sight of many women. I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you; I will be calm and no longer angry.”<sup>178</sup>

The Hebrew text introduces vs. 11 with the particle *kiy*, which can be rendered variously with “and,” “because,” “therefore,” “although,” and others. This explains the various renderings of the verse, as: “Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning” (NIV), or “Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin” (KJV). In the latter rendering, the altars were built for the purpose of sinning, in the service of idols, not of YHWH. The former interpretation suggests that the altars were initially erected to honor God, but that the service was corrupted. That seems to be consistent with Jeroboam’s original purpose in erecting the altars of Bethel and Dan, if we may give him so much benefit of the doubt.<sup>179</sup> One of the problems is that the Hebrew word *chata*’ can be rendered “to sin,” as well as “to offer for sin.”

In the verse: “I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien” we find two Hebrew words that deserve a closer look. “The many things” is a translation of *ribbow*, which literally means: “a myriad,” or “an indefinitely large number.” “Something alien” is the translation of *zuwr*, which means: “to turn aside (especially for lodging); hence to be a foreigner, strange, profane; specifically to commit adultery.” The expression “a myriad” may be what the people thought about the law of God; as if it consisted of an infinite number of laws and bylaws in which one could lose himself. Isaiah

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<sup>175</sup> Gen. 31:37 (KJV)

<sup>176</sup> See II Kings 15:19,20

<sup>177</sup> Gen. 16:12

<sup>178</sup> Ezek. 16:37-42

<sup>179</sup> See I Kings 12:26-29

conveys this in words that represent the opinion of the people of his time about the law of God: “For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.”<sup>180</sup> God’s law was no longer seen as an expression of His holy character but as an endless series of “do’s and don’ts,” impractical and irrelevant for daily life. This irrelevance is expressed in the word *zuwr*, which at the same time as we saw above, contains a suggestion of adultery. Hosea’s masterful play-on-words is almost impossible translate into English.

If God’s Word ought to have been “indigenous” to anyone, it was to the people of Israel. When the law was given, Moses said to the people: “This will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ What other nation is so great as to have their God’s near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”<sup>181</sup> In losing their vision on the law, they lost their concept of God. All this was the fruit of Jeroboam’s sin, who broke with God’s revelation. “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”<sup>182</sup> TLB gives the interesting paraphrase: “Even if I gave her ten thousand laws, she’d say they weren’t for her—that they applied to someone far away.”

We may interpret the words: “They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat” to mean that the sacrifices belonged to the Lord but they were given to the idols.

Hosea’s prophecy that the people would return to Egypt was a reference to Moses’ warning of what would happen if Israel would become unfaithful to God: “The LORD will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.”<sup>183</sup> *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “Many of them did return to Egypt after the conquest of Palestine by Shalmaneser, and many after the ruin of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; but they had in effect returned to Egypt by setting up the worship of the golden calves, which were in imitation of the Egyptian Apis.” God never intended Israel to return to Egypt, the land of their slavery; He never wants anyone who has been redeemed from his sin to return to his former condition of slavery. Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Peter compares people who have known salvation and who fall back into slavery of sin with: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”<sup>184</sup>

The accusation that Israel has built “palaces,” as reads the NIV seems to be an unfortunate rendering of the Hebrew word *heykal*. It can mean either “a temple” or “a palace,” but “temple” seems to be the word the context requires. The reference is obviously to the elaborate shrines erected for the idol worship. The rendering “palaces” is, however, understandable since the word *armown*, which can be translated “palace,” is used in the same verse. *Armown* is derived from a word meaning: “to be elevated,” which could also refer to the high places on which the idol sacrifices were brought.

This last verse must be seen, primarily, as a warning to Judah, who has observed Israel’s spiritual and moral decline, but has not responded by drawing closer to God herself.

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<sup>180</sup> Isa. 28:10

<sup>181</sup> Deut. 4:6-8

<sup>182</sup> Prov. 29:18

<sup>183</sup> Deut. 28:68

<sup>184</sup> II Peter 2:22

**C. The Judgment of Israel by God****9:1--10:15****1. Judgment of Dispersion**

9:1-9

*1 Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor.*

*2 Threshing floors and winepresses will not feed the people; the new wine will fail them.*

*3 They will not remain in the LORD's land; Ephraim will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria.*

*4 They will not pour out wine offerings to the LORD, nor will their sacrifices please him. Such sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat them will be unclean. This food will be for themselves; it will not come into the temple of the LORD.*

*5 What will you do on the day of your appointed feasts, on the festival days of the LORD?*

*6 Even if they escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briars, and thorns will overrun their tents.*

*7 The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac.*

*8 The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God.*

*9 They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.*

It has been suggested that Hosea spoke this prophecy during one of Israel's festivals. It would be difficult to determine which festival that would be, especially since some of them had been established arbitrarily by Jeroboam I in deviation from the ones prescribed by the Law of Moses.<sup>185</sup> The setting may be a harvest feast. Because of the compact style, it is again difficult to ascertain the meaning of the prophet's words. Some commentators read vs. 1 to speak of a harvest festival during which the people rejoice in the good harvest, which they see as a result of their idol worship; as if Baal and Ashtaroth could be credited for the abundance. Others interpret the joy to be a rejoicing over the abundant wages of prostitution.

As a matter of fact, the prophet seems to say in vs. 2, there will be no rejoicing at all because there will be no harvest. Israel will be led into captivity to Assyria before the crops can be harvested.

Vs. 4 carries a suggestion of what could have been if Israel had remained faithful to God; there could have been the joyful bringing of first fruit offerings and sacrifices in which God was recognized as the Lord of the harvest who had poured out His blessing over His people. Being led away in captivity, there will be nothing to celebrate evermore. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "It is aptly remarked by Grotius that 'they failed to pour out libations to the Lord when they could; now the time shall come when they may wish to make such libations, but cannot.' "

Captivity would mean for all the Israelites the end of kosher living. Their lives in captivity would be marked and dominated by death and death meant uncleanness. The law stipulated: "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone and fails to purify himself defiles the LORD's tabernacle. That person must be cut off from Israel. Because the water of cleansing has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean; his uncleanness remains on him. This is the law that applies when a person dies in a tent: Anyone who enters the tent and anyone who is in it will be unclean for seven days."<sup>186</sup> It could also mean that, in order to stay alive in captivity, the captives would have to eat the food of the land that had either been sacrificed to idols, or consisted of animals that, according to the Mosaic law, were considered unclean. Daniel and his friends faced this dilemma when they were taken to Babylon and were required the food of the palace.<sup>187</sup>

The end of vs. 4, which reads: "This food will be for themselves; it will not come into the temple of the LORD" is difficult to interpret. The Hebrew is very compact and reads literally: "For their bread for their

<sup>185</sup> See I Kings 12:32,33

<sup>186</sup> Num. 19:11,13,14

<sup>187</sup> See Dan. 1:5-16

soul shall not come in the house of the LORD.” TLB paraphrases this: “They may eat this food to feed themselves, but may not offer it to God.” This may mean that they have barely enough to feed themselves and that the option of dedicating their sustenance to the Lord in the form of a grain offering will no longer be an option, since the temple is out of reach in their captivity. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* explains: “The bread for the common support of life shall not be sanctified to them by having the first-fruits presented at the temple.” When Israel was still in the desert and was being fed by the daily manna God provided, Moses made the profound statement: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”<sup>188</sup> At that time Israel understood the purpose of their testing. God wanted them to understand the difference between their stomach and their soul. The food they ate was a symbol of the real spiritual food as the sustenance of eternal life. For Israel in captivity all this had lost its meaning. And where life loses meaning hope is gone.

Vs. 5 pictures Israel in captivity, remembering their celebrations in their homeland and feeling more miserable because the past is irretrievable. It would be like the remembering of the death of a loved one on a birthday or anniversary. This sentiment is well expressed in the psalm written during the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.”<sup>189</sup>

Vs. 6 also is open to various interpretations, due to the density of the Hebrew. The statement “Their treasures of silver” has been variously considered to be: the silver, they treasured so much, or their silver idols, or the silver ornaments on their luxuriously built mansions. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “We have a thrilling picture of distress. First comes the destruction of their native city; having looked their last look on the ruins where once stood their home, they have set forth — a miserable band of pilgrims — to the land of the stranger, and that stranger their conqueror and oppressor; they have reached the place of exile, there to find, not a home, but a grave, and not a single grave for each, according to the Jews’ mode of sepulture to the present day, but a common place of burial into which they are huddled together, Egypt gathering them and Memphis burying them; while in the land that gave them birth, their once happy homesteads, richly decorated and expensively adorned, are left utterly desolate — a heritage for thorns and thistles.” Egypt here, as in vs. 3, may mean the geographical location or, symbolically, a return to their previous condition of slavery. We have no biblical record of any migration of people from the northern kingdom to Egypt.

The confusion of interpretation continues in the following verses. The question is whose hostility, or “hatred,” which is the meaning of the Hebrew word *mastemah*. Some interpret this to be Israel’s hatred toward God, others of God’s hatred of Israel. And who considers whom to be “a fool” and “a maniac?” Some believe that this speaks of the people’s reaction to God’s prophets, others that it refers to the false prophets. The way the NIV renders this section slants toward the former.

The Lord’s prophets are, in fact, His appointed watchmen. Isaiah quotes God as saying to the people of Jerusalem: “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.”<sup>190</sup> For those true prophets of God, Israel has set snares, or if we take the opposite interpretation, the prophecy of the false prophets entrapped the people of Israel and brought them down into apostasy. *Barnes’ Notes* quotes Jerome who said: “On searching diligently ancient histories, I could not find that any divided the Church, or seduced people from the house of the Lord, except those who have been set by God as priests and prophets, i.e. watchmen. These then are turned into a snare, setting a stumbling-block everywhere, so that whosoever enters on their ways, falls, and cannot stand in Christ, and is led away by various errors and crooked paths to a precipice.”

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<sup>188</sup> Deut. 8:3

<sup>189</sup> Ps. 137:1-6

<sup>190</sup> Isa. 62:6,7



“The corruption, as in the days of Gibeah” is a reference to the gang rape of a concubine of a Levite by a group of Benjamites in Gibeah, which almost led to the extinction of the whole tribe of Benjamin.<sup>191</sup> In referring to this tragic incident, this blot on Israel’s history, God reaches back in time for more than a millennium. This reference to ancient history has frightening implications for all of us. It suggests not only that God has an infallible memory (that can be expected from an omniscient God) but also that God holds us responsible for the collective guilt of our forebears, unless we disassociate ourselves from them and their sin. Another example of this is Jesus’ imputation of the collective guilt of all the murders committed in the history of mankind upon the generation of His time. In His tirade against the Pharisees He said: “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.”<sup>192</sup> Israel had evidently returned to the condition of Sodom and Gomorrah that were destroyed in the days of Abraham.

## 2. Judgment of Barrenness

9:10-17

**10** *"When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved.*

**11** *Ephraim’s glory will fly away like a bird- no birth, no pregnancy, no conception.*

**12** *Even if they rear children, I will bereave them of every one. Woe to them when I turn away from them!*

**13** *I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim will bring out their children to the slayer."*

**14** *Give them, O LORD- what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.*

**15** *"Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house. I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious.*

**16** *Ephraim is blighted, their root is withered, they yield no fruit. Even if they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring."*

**17** *My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him; they will be wanderers among the nations.*

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* introduces this section with the following observation: “In this section the arrangement of the contents in strophes becomes very apparent. Three times (viz., Hos 9:10; 10:1, and 11:1) does the prophet revert to the early days of Israel, and show how Israel has been unfaithful to its divine calling, and from time immemorial has responded to all the manifestations of the love and grace of God by apostasy and idolatry, so that the Lord is obliged to punish the degenerate and obstinate nation with banishment into exile and the destruction of the kingdom. Nevertheless, as the Holy One, and for the sake of His own unchangeable covenant faithfulness, He will not utterly eradicate it.”

God’s passionate love for Israel is depicted in two pictures of delightful surprise: grapes in the desert and young figs on a fig tree. It reminds us of Jesus’ beautiful parable of The Treasure in the Field and The Pearl of Great Value. We read in Matthew’s Gospel: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”<sup>193</sup> It is difficult to imagine for us God’s joyful enthusiasm over the people He created and loves. We believe that elements of surprise are purely human, but evidently God can experience the same kind of joy that we feel when surprised.

God’s initial joy, however, is sadly offset by Israel’s unredeemable fall into the sin of idolatry. The reference to the desert does not necessarily refer to God’s adoption of Israel during their desert crossing,

<sup>191</sup> See Judg. 19:16-30

<sup>192</sup> Matt. 23:35,36

<sup>193</sup> Matt. 13:44-46

after their exodus from Egypt. God considered Israel to be His people long before that. His Word to Pharaoh was: "Let my people go."<sup>194</sup> "The fathers" refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A closer study of the lives of the patriarchs, however, reveals that they did not conform too closely to the image of grapes in the desert and early figs. And the character of Israel in the desert does not correspond to this picture either. Actually, the mention Baal Peor refers to Israel's sin with the women of Moab, who acted on the advice of Balaam. We read the account in Numbers: "While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them."<sup>195</sup> In His excitement over Israel God looked beyond the people to His Son, Jesus, of whom He said from heaven, at the moment of His baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."<sup>196</sup> In a way, God always looked at Israel as if they were covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The guilt of their idolatry did not merely consist in their consecration to Baal Peor but in the fact that they had withdrawn themselves from the protection of the blood of the sacrifices to YHWH. This left them not only vulnerable to the wrath of God and to death but it sucked them into the abomination of sexual immorality and murder of infants that were part of that cult.

The image of the early figs reminds us of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree. Mark records the incident: "The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him say it."<sup>197</sup> Jesus may have had Hosea's words in mind, hoping to find the surprise of figs out of season. At that time, Israel was no longer involved in any cult of idolatry, but the condition of their souls had not changed since the days of Hosea. Their infidelity had merely taken on a different form.

The name Ephraim means fruitfulness. When Potiphara gave birth to her second son, Joseph said: "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."<sup>198</sup> And when Jacob pronounced his blessing on Ephraim, he said: "His descendants will become a group of nations."<sup>199</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on vs. 11: The greatest glory, perhaps, of Ephraim was their fruitfulness — 'double fruitfulness' being the very meaning of the name and the multiplication of their numbers; now that glory of populousness was to vanish speedily and entirely, like birds winging their way swiftly and out of sight. After the figure comes the fact, and it is expressed in anti-climactic form — no childbearing, no pregnancy, no conception. The curse of barrenness takes the place of the blessing of fruitfulness. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left. Even if their sons should grow up to manhood and attain maturity, yet they would be cut off by the sword and swept away by death, so that their progeny would perish." A Jewish Rabbi, Rashi comments on the verse: "For what benefit have they when they bring up their children? Because, if they do bring them up, then I bereave them so that they do not become men;"

Hosea proclaims: "Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird." The Hebrew word for glory is *kabowd*, which actually means: "weight." It can be used in the sense of human possessions as in: "Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, 'Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.'"<sup>200</sup> It is also used for the glory of the Lord, as in the verse: "And in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD."<sup>201</sup> Paul uses the Hebrew idiom even when he wrote in

<sup>194</sup> Ex. 5:1; 7:16; 8:1,21; 9:1,13; 10:3

<sup>195</sup> Num. 25:1-3

<sup>196</sup> Matt. 3:17

<sup>197</sup> Mark 11:12-14

<sup>198</sup> Gen. 41:52

<sup>199</sup> Gen. 48:19

<sup>200</sup> Gen. 31:1

<sup>201</sup> Ex. 16:7

Greek to the church in Corinth, saying: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”<sup>202</sup> The NIV renders it: “an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” The Bible consistently uses the concept of weight in connection with man’s relationship to God. This is the reason the unrighteous are compared to “chaff that the wind blows away.”<sup>203</sup> Our faith relationship with God gives us the substance that allows us to stand before Him.

In Hosea’s prophecy here, “glory” is expressed in terms of fruitfulness, family life, and happiness. When the glory departs from Ephraim, his name has become meaningless. Joseph’s and Jacob’s blessings on Ephraim are cancelled. The Book of Proverbs states: “Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.”<sup>204</sup> The word order reverses the process of nature, which begins with conception, continues in pregnancy and results in birth. The film is shown in rapid reverse to show the absurdity of the process. It makes us realize what ought to have been, but what was taken away because of infidelity. Even the one child that is born does not grow up to maturity. Hosea must have looked back on his own failed marriage to Gomer: the second and the third child born were not his and the first child Jezreel would never reach manhood.

All this is the result of the Lord’s turning away from them. They had never understood that their fruitfulness was linked to the presence of the Lord in their midst. Now they would experience the barrenness of being forsaken by God.

Hosea compares Ephraim to Tyre, or maybe he suggests that Ephraim’s borders touched to Tyre. *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “The picture is that of a fair tree, not chance-sown, but ‘planted’ carefully by hand in a pleasant place. Beauty and strength were blended in her. On the tribe of Joseph especially, Moses had pronounced the blessing: ‘Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep which coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moons (i.e., month by month) and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills and for the precious things of the earth and the fullness thereof, and for the good pleasure of Him who dwelt in the bush’ (Deut 33:13-16). Beautiful are the mountains of Ephraim, and the rich valleys or plains which break them. And chief in beauty and in strength was the valley, whose central hill its capital, Samaria, crowned; ‘the crown of pride to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower which is on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine’ (Isa 28:1). The blessing of Moses pointed perhaps to the time when Shiloh was the tabernacle of Him, who once dwelt and revealed Himself in the bush. Now that it had exchanged its God for the calves, the blessings which it still retained, stood but in the more awful contrast with its future.”

And *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The meaning, then, is that Ephraim is a lovely land in whatever direction one looks towards it, like the famous Tyre; it was beautiful and blooming, populous as well as pleasant; or rather, strong in its natural fortifications, like the famous capital of Phoenicia; yet the wrath of Heaven hung over it — it would become waste and emptied of its male population, Ephraim being obliged to send forth the bravest of her sons to repel the hostile invader, and to perish in the tumult of the battle.”

Most commentators see vs.14: “Give them, O LORD- what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry” as a prayer of intercession. Better to be barren and have no children than bringing children into this world that will be slaughtered. I am reminded of the story of a Jewish lady in Nazi Germany who was pregnant and who gave away her baby buggy before being taken to a camp where she knew she would be exterminated. She knew that the child to be born would never survive the horrors that lay ahead. How terrible it is when that which is one of the most precious things in human life, the birth of a baby, turns into terror and despair. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this verse: “There is an uncommon beauty in these words. The prophet, seeing the evils that were likely to fall upon his countrymen, begins to make intercession for them; but when he had formed the first part of his petition, ‘Give them, O Lord!’ the prophetic light discovered to him that the petition would not be answered, and that God was about to give them something widely different. Then changing his petition, which the divine Spirit had interrupted, by signifying that he must not proceed in his request, he asks the question, then, ‘What wilt thou give them?’ and the answer is, ‘Give them a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts.’ And this he is commanded to announce.

<sup>202</sup> II Cor. 4:17 (KJV)

<sup>203</sup> Ps. 1:4

<sup>204</sup> Prov. 23:5

It is probable that the Israelites had prided themselves in the fruitfulness of their families, and the numerous population of their country. God now tells them that this shall be no more; their wives shall be barren, and their land cursed.” We must constantly remind ourselves of the fact that the purpose of announcing judgment is always an act of mercy; it opens the door of repentance and restoration.

Gilgal had historically been the place where God’s presence was revealed in particular ways. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Gilgal had been the scene of many mercies; there the rite of circumcision, the seal of the Abrahamic covenant, after its omission during the sojourn in the wilderness, was renewed; there the Passover, also omitted from its second observance at Sinai, was kept; there the twelve memorial stones had been set up; there the Captain of the host of the Lord had appeared to Joshua, reassuring him of Divine protection; there the tabernacle had stood before its removal to Shiloh; yet that very place — a place of such blessing and solemn covenanting—had become the scene of idolatry and iniquity. The wickedness of Israel had been concentrated there as in a focus; there Israel’s rejection of the theocracy in its spiritual form had taken place; there that first-plague spot of ruin had been contracted; there the calf-worship had been developed; there the form of civil government had been shaped according to their own erring fancy, and their mode of religious worship had been corrupted. Thus Gilgal had become the center of all their sin; but the scene of mercy became the source of wrath, for there God’s fatherly love was turned by Israel’s wickedness into hatred.” Not much is known about the idolatrous practices in Gilgal, but Hosea mentions it in ch. 4:15 as one of the centers of iniquity.

The words: “I will no longer love them” are a reference to Gomer’s second child, of whom God had said to Hosea: “Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them.”<sup>205</sup> The Hebrew word in both verses is identical. The linking of the two pronouncements must have been a strong and painful reminder to Hosea of God’s emotional struggle; he was in a position where he could understand clearly what those words meant to God.

Hosea continues to mix his metaphors, comparing Israel with a tree that is no longer bearing fruit and, at the same time, speaking about his children. This is consistent with the meaning of the name “Ephraim,” which means fruitfulness.

The NIV renders the Hebrew rather freely as: “Ephraim is blighted.” TLB reads: “Ephraim is doomed.” The root and the leaves represent the older generation and the new; both are stricken to the point that Israel’s tree is dying. We use the word “tree” also for the plant as well as for the family.

Hosea’s use of the possessive pronoun “my” in the last verse of this chapter reveals his complete agreement with what God is doing. “My God will reject them” is a justification of God’s judgment. God is always justified in His judgments. John, in Revelation, hears one of the angels say: “You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” He continues: “And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’”<sup>206</sup> “The altar” in this context may stand for those who had lost their lives because of their testimony for Christ and whose souls were under the altar.<sup>207</sup>

In all of this Hosea demonstrates that he is, first of all, a citizen of heaven and that his citizenship of Israel is secondary. Yet, Hosea was an Israelite, through and through. His pain for Israel must have equaled his pain for the wife that had been unfaithful to him. But in all of this, he was clearly on the Lord’s side.

In calling God “My God” the prophet draws a sharp line between himself and the rest of the nation, who could no longer call YHWH “their God.”

*Barnes’ Notes* comments beautifully: “As if God were his God only who clove to him, not theirs who had, by their disobedience, departed from Him. ‘My God.’ ‘He had then authority from Him,’ whom he owned and who owned ‘him,’ and who bade him so speak, as though God were ‘his’ God, and no longer theirs. God ‘casts them away,’ lit. ‘despises them,’ and so rejects them as an object of aversion to Him, ‘because they did not hearken to Him.’ ‘God never forsakes unless He be first forsaken.’ When they would not hearken, neither doing what God commanded, nor abstaining from what He forbade, God at last rejected them, as worthless, lacking altogether to that end for which He created them.”

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<sup>205</sup> ch. 1:6

<sup>206</sup> Rev. 16:5-7

<sup>207</sup> See Rev. 6:9

Centuries earlier, Moses had foretold what would happen to those who would forsake God and disobey His law: "Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods--gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart."<sup>208</sup>

As we mentioned earlier, no trace of the ten tribes can be found anywhere, apart from those who migrated to Judah in the early days of the reign Jeroboam I. We read in Second Chronicles: "The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel sided with him. The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the LORD. Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers."<sup>209</sup> This is the reason we find members of the previous northern kingdom in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. Luke states that, at the occasion of Jesus' circumcision in Jerusalem, "There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher."<sup>210</sup>

Even after the rebirth of the state of Israel in 1948, the inhabitants of modern Israel are few in comparison with those who are still in the Diaspora. There are presently still more Jews living in New York City than in the whole of Israel.

### 3. Judgment of Destruction

10:1-15

*1 Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones.*

*2 Their heart is deceitful, and now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones.*

*3 Then they will say, "We have no king because we did not revere the LORD. But even if we had a king, what could he do for us?"*

*4 They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field.*

*5 The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven. Its people will mourn over it, and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendor, because it is taken from them into exile.*

*6 It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its wooden idols.*

*7 Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters.*

*8 The high places of wickedness will be destroyed- it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"*

*9 "Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel, and there you have remained. Did not war overtake the evildoers in Gibeah?"*

*10 When I please, I will punish them; nations will be gathered against them to put them in bonds for their double sin.*

*11 Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her fair neck. I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plow, and Jacob must break up the ground.*

*12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.*

*13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,*

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<sup>208</sup> Deut. 28:64,65

<sup>209</sup> II Chron 11:13,14,16

<sup>210</sup> Luke 2:36

**14 the roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated- as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children.**

**15 Thus will it happen to you, O Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.**

The concluding thought of the previous chapter is carried over into the beginning of this one. In chapter 9, Israel was represented under the figure of “grapes in the desert” and “early fruit on the fig tree.” Here she is depicted as a vine. The picture is borrowed from the blessing Jacob pronounced over Joseph on his deathbed: “Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall.”<sup>211</sup> Asaph carries this on in one of his psalms: “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River.”<sup>212</sup>

The picture is complicated by the word *baqaq*, which the KJV: renders “empty,” and newer translations translate: “luxurious.” The literal meaning of the word is “to empty,” or “to depopulate,” which allows the rendering: “to spread out.” The context suggests that the blessing of Israel’s fruitfulness turned into a curse because of the use that was made of it. None of the abundance was used for the glory of God but for self-satisfaction and idolatry. As the empty fig tree on which Jesus found no fruit, so God found nothing to satisfy Himself on Israel’s vine. The fruitfulness of Ephraim had become meaningless.

The NIV reads: “Their heart is deceitful,” which renders the spirit of the text correctly. But the Hebrew word *chalaq* literally means “to be smooth,” or “to divide.” As such we find it in the text: “During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.”<sup>213</sup> The KJV’s “Their heart is divided” seems closest to the original. James carries over this thought in a New Testament context about the man who doubts God’s faithfulness: “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”<sup>214</sup> Commentators are also divided as to the meaning of the word. The ancients interpret it as meaning that the people had divided their allegiance between YHWH and the idols. Some read it as meaning that they had separated themselves from God and His law. The more modern ones prefer the reading of “being smooth,” suggesting that the heart is hypocritical.

The Hebrew word in the line: “The LORD will demolish their altars” is *araph*, which means: “to break the neck.” As such we find it in the verse: “Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.”<sup>215</sup> *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “*arap* ‘to break the neck of the altars,’ is a bold expression, applied to the destruction of the altars by breaking off the horns (compare Amos 3:14). Then will the people see and be compelled to confess that it has no longer a king, because it has not feared the Lord, since the king who has been set up in opposition to the will of the Lord.” The verses in Amos, referred to, reads: “On the day I punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground.”<sup>216</sup>

The function of the horns of the altar is nowhere clearly explained in the Scriptures. Ironically, the only examples we have are negative ones. The Mosaic law, for instance, states: “But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.”<sup>217</sup> And there are only two

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<sup>211</sup> Gen. 49:22

<sup>212</sup> Ps. 80:8-11

<sup>213</sup> Gen. 14:15

<sup>214</sup> James 1:6-8

<sup>215</sup> Ex. 13:13

<sup>216</sup> Amos 3:14

<sup>217</sup> Ex. 21:14

instances mentioned in Scripture in which people actually took hold of the horns of the altar, neither of which actually survived. We read: “Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar.”<sup>218</sup> And: “When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar.”<sup>219</sup> Positively, we can reduce from this that there was a consensus that, since atonement for sin was made upon the altar by the blood of the sacrificial animals, the altar was a safe place for those who needed atonement for the sins they had committed. The above stated examples, however, prove that there were sins that the blood of the altar could not cover. The blood of Jesus covers all sins, even the premeditated ones. In the words of the apostle Paul: “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”<sup>220</sup>

The words: “Then they will say, ‘We have no king because we did not revere the LORD. But even if we had a king, what could he do for us?’ ” are again subject to various interpretation. This remind us of the concluding thought in the Book of Judges: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”<sup>221</sup> One of the points of contention is the time factor. When will Israel come to that conclusion? After they have been led into captivity or before? Another question is the actual meaning of the words. Some think they reflect a spirit of anarchy, as would later be evinced during the French revolution: “No God, no master!”<sup>222</sup> This probably correctly represents the spirit of that age, but it seems to pose linguistic problems. The words may stand for a genuine recognition that none of the kings of the northern kingdom ever considered themselves to reign “by the grace of God.” They all acted as if they reigned instead of God. That recognition could have saved Israel as a nation if it had come at an earlier date. When it came later, it may still have saved some souls.

Verses 4-8 describe again the moral decline of the nation by the perversion of justice. The words: “They make many promises” are the NIV’s rendering of the Hebrew, which simply states: “They have spoken words.” The thought obviously is that words have become meaningless. A given word was no longer identical to a reliable promise. A break with God results in a moral vacuum. But a moral vacuum can never exist for long; it is immediately filled with, what the Bible calls: “poison.” Moses had warned the people that such would be the result of idolatry. We read: “Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.”<sup>223</sup> Amos came to the same conclusion as Hosea: “But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness.”<sup>224</sup> This degeneration of moral concepts poisoned both the life of the private citizen as the judicial system of the nation. There was a systematic corruption of justice, expressed in the figure of the plowed field. It was not a growing of unintentional weeds but a premeditated perversion. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states correctly: “They broke up the furrows, preparing the soil deliberately for the cultivation of injustice (which is the only kind of judgment know): so they are ripe for the divine judgment.” The judicial system of the Nazi government in Germany is one modern example of what Israel must have been like under the reign of its last kings.

In vs. 5, the prophet uses a language of subtle sarcasm. The people are afraid for their idol, or of their idol. The Hebrew reads literally: “Theinhabitantsof Samaria shallfear becauseofthecalvesof Beth-Aven.” Their fear may be because of the danger of their deportation to Assyria, or it may refer to the fear that was involved in their worship. The fear spoken of here, whatever interpretation we give to the above, is not related to the fear of the Lord, that wholesome reverence for God’s glory and majesty. It is the

<sup>218</sup> I Kings 1:50

<sup>219</sup> I Kings 2:28

<sup>220</sup> Acts 13:38,39

<sup>221</sup> Judg. 21:25

<sup>222</sup> “Ni Dieu, ni maître.”

<sup>223</sup> Deut. 29:18

<sup>224</sup> Amos 6:12

fear of darkness. Anthropologists tend to judge foreign cultures while wearing a Judeo-Christian pair of glasses. The term “religion” is usually associated with joy, peace, and comfort prevalent in Christian or Judaistic worship. A botanist, visiting the Baliem Valley in Dutch New Guinea in 1938, before any missionary work had begun in the area, observed that the natives seemed happy in their primitive religion. Not speaking a word of their language, I don’t know how he came to this conclusion, apart from the fact that he looked at them from a vantage point of prejudiced philosophy. When missionaries later entered the area in 1954, they discovered that the religious practices of the natives were basically a form of self-defense against the evil powers that tried to kill them. Far from being “happy in their primitive religion” theirs was a religion of fear. Hosea may have referred to this kind of fear in relation to the idol worship. After all, who would not be in a state of panic before a god who could, at any time, demand the sacrifice of one’s children?

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states that King Menahem may have given one of the golden calves to Pul, the king of Assyria, “to ensure his assistance.”

The calf of Bethel supposedly was a young steer. The Hebrew word is *ʿegel*. Hosea uses the female word *ʿeglah*, as if to doubt its masculinity. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The Hebrews ignored the existence of female divinities, as of their ten names of the Deity all are masculine. The feminine may also imply their weakness; so far from helping their worshippers, their worshippers were in trepidation for them, or rather it, lest it should be carried away captive. Further, this same word is in the plural, to cast ridicule on it, as if mimicking the plural of majesty, or rather, perhaps, to include that of Dan, or to intimate that the calf of Bethel, the more celebrated place, was that after which the calf of Dan and probably those of other places were fashioned, especially so as it is afterwards referred to in the singular.”

Another subtlety is the change of the name Bethel into Beth-Aven. Bethel means “House of God,” Beth-Aven means “House of Vanity.”

If it is true, as *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* supposes, that the gold calf was sent as a present to King Pul, it turned out to be a down payment for Israel’s coming deportation. TLB expresses well the ire of Hosea’s words: “The people of Samaria tremble lest their calf-god idols at Beth-aven should be hurt; the priests and people, too, mourn over the departed honor of their shattered gods. This idol-this calf-god thing-will be carted with them when they go as slaves to Assyria, a present to the great king there. Ephraim will be laughed at for trusting in this idol; Israel will be put to shame.”

The end of the northern kingdom is depicted as the king floating away as a chip of wood on the water. The Hebrew word *qetseph* means: “a splinter,” but it is often used as an expression of wrath. The KJV renders it: “foam, indignation, or wrath.” The places where the altars stood, the centers of idolatry will be overgrown with weeds, the ultimate expression of man’s failure to be what God wants him to be. God said to Adam: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.”<sup>225</sup> *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “These same two plants are named together in the cursing of the ground for Adam’s sin (Gen 3:18) and there alone does the word, translated ‘thistle,’ occur. Hosea, probably, was using the words of Genesis, in that, as a sort of proverb, he joins these two, out of sixteen names of the class of plant which occur in the Old Testament.”

The prophet’s words were spoken against the background of the mountains of northern Israel. Some of them may reflect the people’s reaction and their actual words during the earthquake that occurred two years after Amos’ prophecy.<sup>226</sup> Evidently, this earthquake topped all earthquakes that have ever been recorded on the Richter scale, which at that time had not been invented yet. We can hardly imagine the confusion this quake must have caused. People lost all sense of reality in that, in order to escape the danger, they ran toward it. One does not run for cover to the mountain caves when the rocks are flying. The physical panic the quake caused is, therefore, a shadow of the spiritual panic. The people of the earth will flee toward one death in order to escape another. *Barnes’ Notes* quotes an old sage, who said: “I dread the gnawing worm, and the living death. I dread to fall into the hands of a living death, and a dying life. This is ‘the second death,’ which never out-killeth, yet which ever killeth. How would they long to die once, that they might not die forever! ‘They who say to the mountains, fall on us, and to the hills, cover us,’ what do they will, but, by the aid of death, either to escape or to end death? ‘They shall seek death, but shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them,’ saith John (Rev 9:6).”

In the New Testament, Hosea’s words are quoted twice, first by Jesus and then by John in the Book of Revelation. Jesus’ quotation is against the background of His own death on the cross. Luke records that:

<sup>225</sup> Gen. 3:17,18<sup>a</sup>

<sup>226</sup> See Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5



“A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then ‘they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?’”<sup>227</sup>

The day Christ died was the day of the greatest quake in the history of the universe. This was the quake Haggai foretold: “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.”<sup>228</sup> It was the quake that shook the throne of Satan to the point of collapse. Those that would plead with the mountains to cover them would be the ones connected to the center of this evil power.

The same is true for the quotation in Revelation. John describes the reaction of the people who knew that they had come to the throne of God’s judgment. We read: “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”<sup>229</sup> What Hosea describes about the confusion during the quake predicted in Amos, was a mild shadow of the horror of the spiritual quake that is to come.

For the second time in his prophecy, Hosea refers to the darkest page in Israel’s history, the gang rape by the men of Ephraim in Gibeah.<sup>230</sup> We find the story in the last three chapters of the Book of Judges. The Hebrew text is again very compact and difficult to interpret. The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads: “From the days of Gibeah: thou hast sinned O Israel, there they stood: not did overtake them in Gibeah the battle against the children of iniquity.” TLB paraphrases this: “O Israel, ever since that awful night in Gibeah, there has been only sin, sin, sin! You have made no progress whatever. Was it not right that the men of Gibeah were wiped out?” Israel’s unfaithfulness in her relationship with God is generally depicted as a form of adultery, exemplified in Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. Here it is referred to as rape, even a gang rape, which is the worst form of sexual corruption. That which in Scripture stands for the most intimate form of relationships is perverted into a manifestation of man’s most beastly conduct. Such God considers intimacy between man and Satan to be.

Vs. 10 poses various kinds of problems of interpretation. It is hard for us to imagine that God would take pleasure in punishing people. That appears to contradict the love of God. The best way to interpret this seems to be that Israel’s sinful condition demanded a punishment that would satisfy God’s righteousness. Hosea’s choice of words is actually borrowed from Moses, who warned the people: “Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.”<sup>231</sup>

The second problem is the meaning of the expression: “their double sin.” The Hebrew word is *ayin*, which literally means: “an eye,” or figuratively, by analogy: “a fountain (as the eye of the landscape).” The KJV renders it: “furrow.” The verse reads in the KJV: “It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows.” Since the next verse speaks of threshing and plowing by heifers and oxen, the KJV’s rendering fits well in the context, but that does not make it easier to understand.

*Barnes’ Notes* explains: “This translation has followed an old Jewish tradition, expressed by the vowels of the text, and old Jewish authorities. With other vowels, it may be rendered, literally, ‘in their binding to their two transgressions,’ which gives the same sense, ‘because they bound themselves to their two transgressions,’ or, passively, ‘when they are bound, on account of their two transgressions.’ The ‘two transgressions,’ may designate the two calves, ‘the sin of Israel,’ or the twofold guilt of fornication,

<sup>227</sup> Luke 23:27-31

<sup>228</sup> Hag. 2:20-22

<sup>229</sup> Rev. 6:16,17

<sup>230</sup> See ch. 9:9

<sup>231</sup> Deut. 28:63

spiritual, and in the body; the breach of both tables of God's law; or as Jeremiah says, 'My people hath committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water' (Jer 2:13). (NOTE: Rup.): 'This could not be said of any other nation, which knew not God. For if any such worshiped false gods, they committed only one transgression; but this nation, in which God was known, by declining to idolatry, is truly blamed as guilty of 'two transgressions;' they left the true God, and for, or against, Him they worshiped other gods. For he hath twofold guilt, who, knowing good, rather chooseth evil; but 'he' single, who, knowing no good, taketh evil for good. That nation then, both when, after seeing many wonderful works of God, it made and worshiped one calf in the wilderness; and when, forsaking the house of David and the temple of the Lord, it made itself two calves; yea, and so often as it worshiped those gods of the heathen; and yet more, when it asked that Barabbas should be released but that Christ should be crucified, committed two transgressions, rejecting the good, electing the evil; 'setting sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet; setting darkness as light, and light as darkness' (Isa 5:20)."

Vs. 11 is again subject to as many interpretations as there are interpreters. There is, however, a general agreement that of all the labor of an ox, of threshing and plowing, threshing is the easiest. The law stipulated: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."<sup>232</sup> Oxen that had been trained to thresh tended to be fat and strong. Plowing, however, amounted to heavy labor, tantamount to slavery. Plowing oxen would wear a yoke. Hosea's prophecy, therefore, refers to a change from ease and prosperity to captivity and slavery. Some scholars read, instead of "I will put a yoke on her fair neck," "I will set a rider on Ephraim's neck." Speaking of Israel's deliverance from the slavery in Egypt, one of the psalms uses that image in reverse: "You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance."<sup>233</sup> The yoke probably symbolizes the Assyrian captivity into which the northern kingdom was about to be led.

But the image is more complicated than that. In the next verse we see Ephraim yoked together with Judah, though some interpret this in the sense that Judah is excluded from the yoke. The two oxen are seen as plowing together. It is a picture of hard labor, but Hosea gives it a positive turn by depicting the preparation of the field for the sowing of righteousness and love. The two Hebrew words used are *tsedaqah* and *cheded*. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* states: "In rabbinic Hebrew the noun *tsedaqah* signifies 'alms' or 'demonstrations of mercy.' " *Cheded* is the term used for God's covenant love, often rendered in the KJV: "lovingkindness." This is an amazing verse. Paul speaks about sowing and reaping. In his Epistle to the Galatians we read: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."<sup>234</sup> A harvest is always much greater than the amount of seed used to sow. This is true for both the sowing of sin and of righteousness. Sowing righteousness will produce showers of lovingkindness.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Kimchi explains it correctly, thus: "Sow to yourselves, etc., that is, do good in mine eyes, and the recompense from me shall be far greater than your good deeds, just as if one sows a measure (*seah*), and hopes to reap therefore two measures (*seahs*) or still more. Therefore, he uses in sowing righteousness, and in connection with reaping grace, in order to intimate that grace surpasses righteousness. Or that God rewards men's actions, not according to merit, but according to grace. As men sow, they reap; accordingly Israel is directed to sow according to righteousness — to act righteously in their dealings with their fellowmen; and their reaping or reward would be, not in proportion to what they had sown, not merely commensurate with their righteous actions or dealings, not proportionate to what justice would give; but in proportion to mercy — Divine mercy, and so far above their highest deserts. They are promised a reward far above their poor doings, and irrespective of their sad failings — a reward, not of debt, not of merit, but of grace. The seed-time of righteousness would be followed by a reaping-time proportionate to the boundless measure of the Divine mercy."

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* interpret vs. 12 as if Hosea were speaking of the physical labor of the farmer; the seed of righteousness being "of the best kind, and in just measure" and the reaping in mercy being nothing but the expectation of "a good crop in harvest." There is no doubt in my mind, however, that

<sup>232</sup> Deut. 25:4

<sup>233</sup> Ps. 66:11,12

<sup>234</sup> Gal. 6:7,8

the language is symbolic and that Hosea is not speaking about a field and seed but about a change in moral behavior. The Book of Proverbs uses the same image: “The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.”<sup>235</sup> It is rather unusual for the good doctor to miss the mark by such a wide margin. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states more appropriately: “Sowing and reaping are figures used to denote their spiritual and moral conduct.”

“It is time to seek the LORD.” For centuries, ever since the breaking up of the nation into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel had not sought the Lord at all. The installation of the two calves had been a political maneuver in which the Name of YHWH was used to maintain a religious front. The concept of God dwelling among the people was considered irrelevant. When people leave God out of their lives, they abandon the gold standard of morality.

The admonition to sow righteousness and break up the fallow ground does not suggest that man must first put his life in order before God will pay attention to him. Actually, one cannot sow righteousness without fellowship with God. The plowing and sowing are images of repentance. When John the Baptist preached in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, he said: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”<sup>236</sup> Seeking the Lord means surrendering to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. The prodigal son “sowed righteousness” when he returned home and confessed: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”<sup>237</sup> Breaking up unplowed ground is hard work; repentance is painful; grace is never cheap.

Israel’s condition was completely opposite to seeking the Lord and sowing righteousness. A phrase in depicting their state is: “You have depended on your own strength.” The people had disregarded Solomon’s advice: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”<sup>238</sup>

Vs. 13 depicts a condition completely opposite to what God wanted the people to do. They had planted wickedness. The Hebrew word *charash* literally means: “to plow.” Usually, plowing does not refer to sowing but to preparing a field for sowing. Hosea’s compact language speaks of carefully laid plans to do evil. Sin consisted in premeditated acts, not of spur-of-the-moment spontaneous deeds. Ever since Jeroboam I instituted the idol worship at Bethel and Dan as well-planned policy, Israel had carefully traced and followed its path to sin and destruction. That what started at Bethel ended in Beth-Arbel. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “When they turned Bethel, the house of God, into Beth-aven, the house of vanity, then it became, like Beth-arbel-literally, house of ambush of God-the scene and occasion of their desolation.”

Scholars have pondered the significance of the names “Shalman” and “Beth Arbel.” It is generally supposed that “Shalman” is an abbreviation for Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. “Beth Arbel” may be “Arbela” a city in the Trans Jordanian territory. There is, however, no historical record of the ferocious battle Hosea is referring to. The inhumane cruelty of killing babies in front of their mothers and subsequently killing the mothers is clear evidence of the end of evil’s road. Israel had chosen the wrong path and Hosea shows them where it leads. Usually, we speak about the dawn of a new day in terms of hope and renewal. The dawn of God’s day of wrath, “Dies Irae,” comes with terror for those who face judgment.

The year 722 B.C. marked the end of Israel’s monarchy. King Hoshea was the last king ever to reign over the northern kingdom.

#### **D. The Restoration of Israel to the Lord                      11:1--14:9**

##### **1. God’s Love for Israel    11:1-11**

*1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*

*2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.*

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<sup>235</sup> Prov. 11:18

<sup>236</sup> Matt. 3:2

<sup>237</sup> Luke 15:21

<sup>238</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

*3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.*

*4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.*

*5 "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?"*

*6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.*

*7 My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.*

*8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboïm? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.*

*9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.*

*10 They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.*

*11 They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the LORD.*

In this section, the Lord displays His deep emotional struggle in meting out punishment to Israel and in preparing her for her destruction as a nation. God loved Israel for reasons that will appear later. For a loving parent to give up a child for the sake of justice to punishment that will destroy him is one of the most difficult choices to make. Being a parent, I cannot imagine myself ever being able to do so with one of my own four children. One of the most difficult verses in Scripture is the one in Deuteronomy that reads: "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid."<sup>239</sup> There is no known instance in which this law was ever applied. When Absalom rebelled against his father David and was killed in battle, we read David's reaction: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you-O Absalom, my son, my son!'"<sup>240</sup>

When God sent Moses to the Egyptian court to lead Israel out of Egypt, He ordered him to say to Pharaoh: "Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.'"<sup>241</sup> And after the northern kingdom had been led into captivity, Jeremiah heard God say: "'Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,' declares the LORD."<sup>242</sup> God speaks about Ephraim as a parent about a child who died but who can never be forgotten.

In the context of Hosea's prophecy, God's emotional struggle takes on an even deeper meaning. When Hosea spoke, the deportation was still in the future. For God, however, past, present, and future are all one. We seem to find here again some of the same "divine wishful thinking" that we encountered in previous chapters. When we look at the Bible as a whole and compare Old Testament prophecy with New Testament fulfillment, we see that God spoke about more than Israel's ancient history alone. We find in Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus this strange quotation of Hosea's words: "So [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was

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<sup>239</sup> Deut. 21:18-21

<sup>240</sup> II Sam. 18:33

<sup>241</sup> Ex. 4:22,23

<sup>242</sup> Jer. 31:20

fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.' ”<sup>243</sup> Our first superficial impression is that Matthew takes the verse out of its context. But that thought cannot be reconciled with our belief in divine inspiration of the written Word.

Shortly after my conversion in the Netherlands, I met an American pastor who confessed to taking a liking to me because I reminded him of his own son in the United States. He treated me with extreme kindness. In the same sense we can say that God loved the nation of Israel, because she reminded Him of His own Son. And the whole exodus from Egypt turns out to be the image of an event that would occur in the life of Jesus on earth.

*Barnes' Notes* makes the following profound observation: “Matthew apparently quotes these words, not to prove anything, but in order to point out the relation of God’s former dealings with the latter, the beginning and the close, what relates to the body, and what relates to the Head. He tells us that the former deliverance had its completion in Christ, that in His deliverance was the full solid completion of that of Israel; and that then indeed it might, in its completest fullness, be said, ‘Out of Egypt have I called My Son.’ When Israel was brought out of Egypt, the figure took place; when Christ was called, the reality was fulfilled. The act itself, on the part of God, was prophetic. When He delivered Israel, and called him His firstborn, He willed, in the course of time, to bring up from Egypt His Only-Begotten Son. The words are prophetic, because the event which they speak of, was prophetic. ‘They speak of Israel as one collective body, and, as it were, one person, called by God ‘My son,’ namely, by adoption, still in the years of innocence, and beloved by God, called of God out of Egypt by Moses, as Jesus, His true Son, was by the Angel.’ ”

The similarity between Israel in Egypt and her subsequent exodus and Jesus’ flight to Egypt and His later return to Nazareth is in the fact that thus both lives were saved. Jacob and his sons were saved from starvation and God spared Jesus’ life by taking Him out of the jurisdiction of King Herod who planned to kill Him.

In vs. 2 this similarity ends. God’s primary purpose in Israel’s exodus was, in the words addressed to Pharaoh: “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” God’s calling of the descendants of Jacob out of the slavery of Egypt made them into a nation with independence and dignity. But, with a few exceptions, Israel did not worship her Savior. Almost from the moment of entrance into Canaan, and even earlier, idol worship infiltrated and often dominated the nation.

Verses 3 and 4 refer to Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The “yoke” is an image of the Egyptian slavery. We read in Leviticus that God says: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”<sup>244</sup> The question forces itself upon us why God singles out Ephraim here, since all of Israel was involved in the exodus and not just one tribe. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Kimchi, who explains: “The prophet only mentions Ephraim (instead of all Israel), because it was he that made the calves.”

All the terminology speaks of God’s care in helping Israel to come to maturity and gain the status of an independent nation. After centuries of slavery Israel was unable to immediately realize her identity. Even after regaining her liberty and independence, the people kept on seeing themselves as slaves. The feeling of inferiority that had been imposed upon them by their Egyptian masters did not die out overnight. God had lifted the yoke from their shoulders but they felt as if it were still there. The feeling was like phantom pains in an amputated leg.

A child that is growing up does not understand the development that brings him from childhood to maturity; it takes maturity to understand it. Israel in the desert could not be blamed for not fully comprehending what was happening to her. But once she had come to maturity, once she had completed the conquest of the Promised Land, she had no excuse. Israel ought to have recognized God’s love and care in retrospect, but she did not.

The healing mentioned in vs. 4 stands for more than a healing of physical ailments. Immediately after the exodus, God revealed Himself to His people as *Yahweh Raphah*, the LORD, who heals you. In saying so, God drew a line between Israel and the Egyptians, between those who were under the protection of the blood of the lamb and those who were not. We read in Exodus: “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his

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<sup>243</sup> Matt .2:14,15

<sup>244</sup> Lev. 26:13

decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.”<sup>245</sup> Healing refers particularly to protection from God’s wrath over man’s sin. In the same sense Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”<sup>246</sup> It is hard to imagine that those who had witnessed the Egyptians suffer from the Ten Plagues and who had seen Pharaoh’s army drown in the sea, would attribute their own salvation to any other source than God’s. Yet, God says to Hosea: “They did not realize it was I who healed them.”

The whole picture is one of tenderness and loving care. Moses had used the same words as God to Hosea: “The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.”<sup>247</sup>

Jerome comments on this: “I who was a Father, became a nurse, and Myself carried My little one in My arms, that he should not be hurt in the wilderness, or scared by heat or darkness. By day I was a cloud; by night, a column of fire, that I might by My light illumine, and heal those whom I had protected. And when they had sinned and had made the calf, I gave them place for repentance, and they knew not that I healed them, so as, for forty years, to close the wound of idolatry, restore them to their former health.”

The cords of human kindness and ties of love stand in sharp contrast with the shackles of slavery the people used to wear in Egypt. These cords speak of freedom. We often wrongly suppose that cords and freedom are incompatible. Freedom does not mean an absence of restriction. When Jesus invites us to come to Him and be delivered from the burdens we are wearing, He says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”<sup>248</sup> True freedom is found in the exchange of yokes, not in the shedding of them. Jeremiah speaks of the same cords: “The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’”<sup>249</sup>

The NIV depicts Israel’s position as wavering between Egypt and Assyria. This reflects correctly the political situation of the day in which King Hoshea tried to free himself from Assyrian suppression by appealing to Egypt for help. God changes the accents and the meaning of this by placing the nation between two forms of imprisonment: the slavery of Egypt, which was ancient history, and the Assyrian captivity, which lay ahead. The king of Israel tried to find a solution that was politically expedient. He tried all the options, except the one that could have saved the nation, namely to call upon the Lord. The Assyrian sword of destruction would come down upon the cities of the northern kingdom and the invincible citadel of Samaria would be completely destroyed. We can picture the sword as a modern helicopter with swishing blades that cuts down everything in its reach.

Although the prophet clearly presents the consequences of Israel’s choices, the people never consider the possibility of returning to the Lord. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “[And My people are bent to backsliding from Me] Literally, ‘are hung to it!’ as we say, ‘a man’s whole being *hangs* on a thing.’ A thing ‘hung to’ or ‘on’ another, sways to and fro within certain limits, but its relation to that on which it is hung, remains immovable. Its power of motion is restrained within those limits. So Israel, so the sinner, however he veer to and fro in the details and circumstances of his sin, is fixed and immovable in his adherence to his sin itself. Whatever else Israel did, on one thing his whole being, as a nation, depended, on ‘backsliding’ or aversion from God. The political existence of Israel, as a separate kingdom, depended on his worship of the calves, ‘the sin wherewith’ Jeroboam ‘made Israel to sin.’ This was the ground of their ‘refusing to return’ (Hos 11:5), that, through habitual sin, they were no longer in their own power: they were fixed in evil.”

Verses 8-12 are among the most moving of the whole book of Hosea. The deep emotional struggle between God’s love and His justice is depicted in very human terms. God is shown as debating within Himself what to do. If our understanding of God’s immutability is correct, such a struggle is impossible and,

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<sup>245</sup> Ex. 15:26

<sup>246</sup> I Thess. 1:9,10

<sup>247</sup> Deut. 1:30,31

<sup>248</sup> Matt. 11:28,29

<sup>249</sup> Jer. 31:3

in a way we can say that the account of it is more for our benefit than a representation of reality. The obvious purpose of this section is to demonstrate the love of God for His people.

One of the problems of interpretation is in the fact that, in spite of the promise His “I will not carry out my fierce anger,” and “I will not come in wrath,” God did, in fact, destroy Israel. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Calvin, who commented: “Here, God consults what he is to do with the people; and first, indeed, he shows that it was his purpose to execute vengeance such as the Israelites deserved, even wholly to destroy them; but yet he assumes the character of one deliberating, that none might think that he hastily fell into anger, or that, being soon excited by excessive fury, he devoted to ruin those who had lightly sinned, or were guilty of no great crimes. By these expressions of the text God shows what the Israelites deserved, and that he was now inclined to inflict the punishment of which they were worthy, and yet not without repentance, or at least not without hesitation. He afterwards adds in the next clause, *This I will not do; my heart is within me changed.*” This leaves us with the only possible explanation that the topic here is the punishment of human sin in the person of Jesus Christ, in whom the demands of justice and mercy were reconciled. Even though the northern kingdom was physically eradicated, Israel, ultimately, did not pay for her own sin; God paid Himself.

We should not confuse physical punishment with eternal judgment. The fact that Israel as a nation ceased to exist is not the same as eternal damnation. Jesus emphasizes this distinction in His admonition to the disciples: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”<sup>250</sup>

The question arises why, in his quoting an example of final judgment, the prophet mentions only Admah and Zeboiim and not Sodom and Gomorrah? The former ones are not even mentioned in the Genesis account of the destruction.<sup>251</sup> The reference is probably to Moses’ warning to the people as we find it in Deuteronomy, which must have been so well known among the people that they would immediately be able to fill in the blanks. We read that Moses said: “Your children who follow you in later generations and foreigners who come from distant lands will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it. The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. All the nations will ask: ‘Why has the LORD done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?’ And the answer will be: ‘It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, God’s they did not know, God’s he had not given them. Therefore the LORD’s anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath the LORD uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now.’”<sup>252</sup> It is particularly the reference to the children and foreigners in Moses’ words that make this warning so powerful. The question: “How will my moral behavior influence my children and grandchildren?” can be a strong deterrent against sin.

Having depicted God’s inner emotional struggle between His demand for justice and mercy in terms of human reactions, the prophetic Word states: “For I am God, and not man- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.” We can understand God’s struggle because we sometimes face dilemmas that are similar although not on the same absolute level. The words: “I am God, and not man” do not imply that, as the image of God, we are so totally different from the original that we cannot relate to God’s emotions. The thrust of the statement is that sin has affected the image of God in us to the point where we lose control in anger and go beyond what justice requires. God is God and not man means that He cannot sin or violate the balance of any of His perfect and eternal attributes. As men who have fallen in sin, we are divided against ourselves; God is not.

There are several instances in Scripture in which God distances Himself from man, not because of the image, but because of sin. In the Book of Numbers, the sinful prophet Balaam was forced to say: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does

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<sup>250</sup> Matt. 10:28

<sup>251</sup> See Gen. ch. 18,19

<sup>252</sup> Deut. 29:22-28

he promise and not fulfill?”<sup>253</sup> In Isaiah, God says: “ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’ ” The prophet Micah exclaims: “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.”<sup>254</sup> And in Malachi, God says: “I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”<sup>255</sup> The apostle Paul emphasizes God’s consistency in His covenant with Israel: “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”<sup>256</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Jerome who explains this to mean: “I will not act according to the fury of my anger, nor change from my clemency to destroy Ephraim; for I do not strike to destroy for ever, but to amend... for I am God and not man. Man punishes for this purpose of destroying; God chastises for the purpose of amending.”

Since, however, Ephraim did cease to exist as a nation, we must conclude that God looked beyond the borders of the northern kingdom to the rest of the world. Ephraim, like all of Israel, was meant to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”<sup>257</sup> The fact that they did not form a bridge between God and the rest of the world does not mean that God was willing to let the rest of the world go to hell.

Verses 10 and 11 look toward the return of Israel to their homeland and, probably in a spiritual sense, to a revival of mankind in general. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews spiritualizes Israel’s entering into the Promised Land by saying: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”<sup>258</sup>

The Old Testament prophets frequently represented the call of God as the roaring of a lion. Sometimes this stands for God’s judgment, as in Amos’ prediction: “The LORD roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers.”<sup>259</sup> And: “The lion has roared- who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken- who can but prophesy?”<sup>260</sup> The prophet Joel states: “The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”<sup>261</sup>

The emblem of the lion was first assigned to Judah in the blessing Jacob pronounced upon him. We read: “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.”<sup>262</sup> In this blessing the symbol is linked to the coming of the Messiah, who is called: “the Lion of the

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<sup>253</sup> Num. 23:19

<sup>254</sup> Micah 7:18-20

<sup>255</sup> Mal. 3:6

<sup>256</sup> Rom. 11:28,29

<sup>257</sup> Ex. 19:6

<sup>258</sup> Heb. 4:9-11

<sup>259</sup> Amos 1:2

<sup>260</sup> Amos 3:8

<sup>261</sup> Joel 3:16

<sup>262</sup> Gen. 49:8-10



tribe of Judah.”<sup>263</sup> If we see Hosea’s words in the context of Scripture as a whole, we understand that there is a reference to the coming of the Messiah and Israel’s, and our, following after Him. He is the one who will call His people home. Not only in the sense that Israel would return to Palestine, but as an entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. Commenting on the faith of a Roman centurion, our Lord said: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>264</sup> *Barnes’ Notes* comments beautifully: “They shall ‘follow after’ Him, whose infinite perfections none can reach; yet they shall ‘follow after,’ never standing still, but reaching on to that which is unattainable by His grace, attaining the more by imitating what is inimitable, and stopping short of no perfection, until, in His presence, they be perfected in Him.”

Some scholars consider that vs. 11 forms the conclusion of this chapter and that vs. 12 belongs properly to the next section. Our outline has taken this into consideration.

## **2. Israel’s Continuing Sin 11:12--13:16**

*12 Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, the house of Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.*

*12:1 Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.*

*2 The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.*

*3 In the womb he grasped his brother’s heel; as a man he struggled with God.*

*4 He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-*

*5 the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown!*

*6 But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.*

*7 The merchant uses dishonest scales; he loves to defraud.*

*8 Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."*

*9 "I am the LORD your God, [who brought you] out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed feasts.*

*10 I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them."*

*11 Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field.*

*12 Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep.*

*13 The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.*

*14 But Ephraim has bitterly provoked him to anger; his Lord will leave upon him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.*

*13:1 When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel. But he became guilty of Baal worship and died.*

*2 Now they sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, "They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calf-idols."*

*3 Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.*

*4 "But I am the LORD your God, [who brought you] out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me.*

*5 I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat.*

*6 When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.*

*7 So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path.*

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<sup>263</sup> Rev. 5:5

<sup>264</sup> Matt. 8:11

**8 Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart.**

**9 "You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your helper.**

**10 Where is your king, that he may save you? Where are your rulers in all your towns, of whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes'?"**

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

**12 The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sins are kept on record.**

**13 Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him, but he is a child without wisdom; when the time arrives, he does not come to the opening of the womb.**

**14 "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? "I will have no compassion,**

**15 even though he thrives among his brothers. An east wind from the LORD will come, blowing in from the desert; his spring will fail and his well dry up. His storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures.**

**16 The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open."**

The NKJV renders the last part of vs. 12 of ch. 11: "But Judah still walks with God, Even with the Holy One who is faithful." The NIV reads: "And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One." *The Wickliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The LXX gives an entirely different reading: Judah is still known by God and faithful with the Holy One." Judah had previously been implicated in the northern kingdom's sins; the more modern renderings, therefore, are quite plausible. The lies and deceit of which God accuses Ephraim refer, first of all, to the idolatry that was practiced under the guise of worship of YHWH. When Jeroboam I instituted the religious services at Bethel and Dan, he gave the impression of merely changing the location of the worship center from Jerusalem to the north without changing the content. But the lies and deceit also pertain to the social injustice and moral conduct of the nation.

Feeding on wind can be suicidal. Oxygen is meant for the lungs, not for the stomach. To use air for nourishment can mean starvation and death. But the east wind in Palestine, the so-called "Samoon," was more than a blowing breeze or even a windstorm, it was disaster. The dry wind that came from the Arabian Desert would parch the land. Evidently it would come in such hurricane force that it destroyed. The psalmist refers to it: "You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind."<sup>265</sup> Job speaks about it: "The east wind carries him off, and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place."<sup>266</sup> And in Jeremiah, God says: "Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster."<sup>267</sup>

Pursuing the east wind is the ultimate picture of meaninglessness and destruction. King Solomon uses it as an image of futility. Giving account of his exploits in Ecclesiastes, he states: "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."<sup>268</sup>

Hosea's words, probably, refer to the political maneuvers of King Hoshea who tried to wiggle himself out of his liaison with Assyria by befriending Egypt, a plot which, ultimately, brought Israel down as a nation.

In vs. 2 Judah is included in the judgment. "Jacob" stands here for the whole nation, as it was one before the separation into two kingdoms. Judah's guilt may, at this point, not have measured up to the sin of Ephraim but the southern kingdom under King Ahaz was not blameless.

In contrast to the nation which is called "Jacob" and which became known as "Israel," God shows them the life and conduct of their ancestor of whom they derived their name. Jacob's character, which does not come out too clean in the Genesis record, is placed in a different light in vs. 3. The name "Jacob" does not have a positive connotation. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* explains the meaning: *Ya`qob*... from

<sup>265</sup> Ps. 48:7

<sup>266</sup> Job 27:21

<sup>267</sup> Jer. 18:17

<sup>268</sup> Eccl. 2:11

*`aakab*... to defraud, deceive, to supplant, i.e., to overthrow a person by tripping up his heels. Hence, this name was given to Jacob, because it was found he had laid hold on his brother's heel, which was emblematical of his supplanting Esau, and defrauding him of his birthright." After Jacob's dastardly deed we read: "Eau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!'"<sup>269</sup>

Jacob's grabbing of Esau's heel at birth, to which he owed his name,<sup>270</sup> is mentioned in the same breath with his struggle with God.<sup>271</sup> These two struggles are thus fused into one endeavor that stamped the life of the patriarch. The question arises whether this makes both right or wrong. Is Jacob here depicted as a person who tries to manipulate God as he had manipulated man, or, since he was victorious in the second battle, the one with God, is he pictured as a victor in his human relationships also? When we read Jacob's biography in Genesis, the grabbing of his brother's heel at birth, seems to have set the pattern for his life. All through life, Jacob tried to get to the top by tripping up others. He even tried to obtain that what was legally his by cheating. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Calvin who explains: "Their ingratitude is showed in this, that they did not acknowledge that they had been anticipated, in the person of their father Jacob, by the gratuitous mercy of God. The first history is indeed referred to for this end, that the posterity of Jacob might understand that they had been elected by God before they were born. For Jacob did not, by choice or design, lay hold of the heel of his brother in his mother's womb; but it was an extraordinary thing. It was, then, God who guided the hand of the infant and by this sign testified his adoption to be gratuitous. In short, by saying that Jacob held the foot of his brother in his mother's womb, the same thing is intended as if God had reminded the Israelites that they did not excel other people by their own virtue or that of their parents, but that God of his own good pleasure had chosen them."

Vs. 4 is a complicated verse. Hosea adds to the account Moses gives in Genesis by mentioning Jacob's tears. Evidently, the One with whom Jacob had wrestled gave His own version of the incident to the prophet. Hosea's words: "he wept and begged for his favor" do not contradict Moses' version; they highlight the intensity of Jacob's struggle. The clause "begged for his favor" is the rendering of the one Hebrew word *chanan*, which means: "to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior." Jacob asked that God would do this to him. The same word is found in the priestly blessing: "The LORD make his face shine upon you and *be gracious to you*."<sup>272</sup> Jacob's request can be paraphrased to read that he asked God to come down to him, to his level, and humble Himself before him. If we consider who asked and of whom this was asked, the granting of such a request seems to us inconceivable. Yet, this is what God did for Jacob. He bowed before him and declared him to be the victor. Jacob must have caught a glimpse of the fact that God, in order to save mankind, was willing to surrender to man to the point of dying for him. Jesus clarified this when He said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>273</sup> Jacob asked God, so to speak, to wash his feet, and God did.

In the context of Hosea's prophecy, this truth opens horizons that are beyond human comprehension. In order to secure Israel's salvation from the total destruction that awaited them, God offered Himself to His people as their servant. Israel turned God down, as Peter would do the night of Jesus' betrayal. We read that Peter said to Jesus: "No, you shall never wash my feet." And Jesus answered: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."<sup>274</sup>

Jacob's wrestling with God was, of course, not a physical undertaking; this is clear from that fact that Jacob prayed. It left Jacob, at least partially, physically impaired, but the struggle was spiritual. In a human wrestling match the participants do not ask each other for favors; doing so would mean defeat. However odd this may sound, Jacob acknowledged defeat in asking God to stoop down to him. It was this

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<sup>269</sup> Gen. 27:36

<sup>270</sup> See Gen 25:26

<sup>271</sup> See Gen. 32:24-28

<sup>272</sup> Num. 6:25

<sup>273</sup> Matt. 20:28

<sup>274</sup> John 13:8

prayer for grace that brought him the victory. Grace is the most paradoxical part of God's character. The one who loses wins! That is what God wanted Israel to do.

Hosea leads his audience from Peniel to Bethel, two important places in Jacob's spiritual experience. The Bible mentions two experiences Jacob had at Bethel, one when he fled from his brother Esau<sup>275</sup> and a second after he returned from his extended stay in Mesopotamia.<sup>276</sup> During Jacob's second encounter with God at Bethel, God confirmed to him the promise of His blessing and the possession of the land. Bethel is the name Jacob gave to the place, meaning "House of YHWH." In the history of the northern kingdom Bethel was the center of the faked YHWH worship, which developed into a center of idolatry. In highlighting Bethel's original history, Hosea emphasizes Israel's guilt. Coinciding with Hosea's prophecy, Amos said: "This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: 'Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing.'" One of the reasons Israel lost her vision on God is that they ignored their own history. People, who do not remember from where they came, do not know where they are going.

Some versions of vs. 4 read: "He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us." The difference of opinion of who is addressed is based on a difference in the reading of the Hebrew text. In a way it is always true that what God said to our fathers, He says to us.

The realization of whom the One is who speaks brings Hosea into ecstasy. He bursts out into a doxology: "the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown!" "LORD, God Almighty, the LORD" is a translation of the Hebrew: *Yahweh, Elohim Tsaba'owt, Yahweh. Elohim Tsaba'owt* literally means: "the Lord of hosts," the supreme commander.

The NIV reads vs. 6: "But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The literal rendering brings out the meaning more clearly; it is, "And thou, in [or, 'by'] thy God thou shalt return." If we render the preposition by "in," we may understand it to imply entire dependence on God, or close and cordial fellowship with God; if we take it to mean "by," it signifies the power or help of God; while the return is moral and spiritual, with perhaps material and literal restoration implied." The NKJV confirms the latter interpretation by reading: "So you, by the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, And wait on your God continually." Turning to God will always bring about a change of relationship with our fellowmen. Love of our neighbor is proof of our love of God. It has been observed that Hosea first points to the second table of the Ten Commandments as evidence of the people's sincere repentance and that the second clause of vs. 6 refers to the first table.

*The Pulpit Commentary* introduces the last verses of this chapter with: "Vers. 7-14 contain a fresh description of Israel's apostasy. To this the prophet is led by the preceding train of thought. When he called to mind the earnestness of the patriarch to obtain the blessing, the sincerity of his repentance, and the evidences of conversion, consisting in mercy and judgment and constant waiting on God, he looks around on Israel, and finding those virtues conspicuous by their absence, he repeats the story of their degeneracy."

Under the reign of King Jeroboam II, Israel had achieved extraordinary prosperity. But this affluence was not acquired by the blessing of the Lord; it was the fruit of their dishonesty. In spite of the political decline of the nation under King Hoshea, there must have remained a good deal of wealth among the people. This had fostered the thought that God could be bought off. As if money and power could make up for crime and immorality. Money and power equally carry within them the seed of corruption. People who trust in their material possessions for their salvation have lost sight of the value of their soul. Jesus asked the penetrating question: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>277</sup> The human soul is worth more than the whole world. The one who does not understand this uses the wrong scales.

In a seemingly disjointed manner, Hosea concludes the last section of this chapter by referring to the historical facts that forged Jacob's family into a nation of God's chosen people. These facts are held up to the people by way of comparison to help them understand how far they have strayed from God's original plan.

In the NIV's vs. 9 reads: "I am the LORD your God, [who brought you] out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed feasts." The Hebrew text reads literally: "And I [that

<sup>275</sup> See Gen. 28:11-22

<sup>276</sup> See Gen. 35:9-15

<sup>277</sup> Matt. 16:26,27

am] the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt yet will make thee to dwell in tabernacles as in the days of the solemn feast.” Scholars are divided as to the meaning of these words. Some see in them a threat of punishment: God will reduce them to the former primitive conditions from the time of the desert crossing. Others read this as a promise of restoration. Some even see in them a combination of the two.

The opinions also differ as to the meaning of “your appointed feasts.” Those who hold to the punishment theory do not believe this to refer to the Feast of Tabernacles; others do. We will proceed on the assumption that the Feast of Tabernacles is meant here.

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “The simile, ‘as in the days of the feast,’ shows that the repetition of the leading through the desert is not thought of here merely as a time of punishment, such as the prolongation of the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years really was (Num 14:33). For their dwelling in tents, or rather in booths (*sukkooth*), on the feast of Tabernacles, was intended not so much to remind the people of the privations of their unsettled wandering life in the desert, as to call to their remembrance the shielding and sheltering care and protection of God in their wandering through the great and terrible wilderness (see at Lev 23:42-43). We must combine the two allusions, therefore: so that whilst the people are threatened indeed with being driven out of the good and glorious land, with its large and beautiful cities and houses full of all that is good (Deut 6:10ff.), into a dry and barren desert, they have also set before them the repetition of the divine guidance through the desert; so that they are not threatened with utter rejection on the part of God, but only with temporary banishment into the desert.”

The Feast of Tabernacles was the last in the cycle of festivities of the Jewish year. It coincided with the end of the harvest. We find its institution in Leviticus: “So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>278</sup>

The feast was a strange combination of rejoicing and sober reflection. It reminded man of the transient character of life on earth and the faithfulness of God in leading him through the desert of life. The celebration of this particular feast must have fallen through the cracks in the affluence of the northern kingdom. All of the feasts that the law prescribed were meant to remind Israel of its history and position, of the fact that God had chosen them to play a vital part in this world. It was essential that the people would not forget from where they came and how they had arrived. The testimony of God’s grace ran through all of the commemorations. The people in Hosea’s days had done away with all the celebrations God had ordained. They neither celebrated the Day of Atonement, nor the Feast of Tabernacles. God always wants man to know the way of salvation in the pardon of his sins and the fact that all life on earth is like living in a tent. People who do not celebrate these two crucial facts are lost.

The people who returned from the Babylonian captivity celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. In that sense, they fulfilled Hosea’s prophecy here. We read in Nehemiah: “The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.”<sup>279</sup> Zechariah prophesied that this feast would be celebrated universally at the end of times. We read: “Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.”<sup>280</sup>

In vs. 10, God reminds the people of the three ways He had revealed Himself to the people:

1) He had communicated directly to the prophets. Moses was particularly privileged with this mode of communication. God had testified Himself: “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my

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<sup>278</sup> Lev. 23:39-43

<sup>279</sup> Neh. 8:17

<sup>280</sup> Zech. 14:16

house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.”<sup>281</sup> But almost all of the Old Testament prophets also heard the voice of God speaking to them personally.

2) God revealed Himself to the prophets by way of visions. He lifted for them the veil that is on the eyes of most humans and allowed them to see the spiritual reality that governs all that happens on earth. Zechariah describes this experience as a waking up from the drowsiness of daily life to a reality greater than most of us know. We read: “Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep.”<sup>282</sup>

3) In speaking to the people through the prophets, God used parables, pictures, and object lessons. We live no longer in a dispensation in which God communicates in that way. The writer of Hebrews states: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”<sup>283</sup> For us the Word of God is incarnate and it is written down.

The Hebrew Interlinear Bible reads vs. 11: “Is there iniquity in Gilead?” The NIV simply asks: “Is Gilead wicked?” The rhetorical question is typically Hebrew idiomatic. The answer is supposed to be affirmative. Gilead was located east of the Jordan River and Gilgal on the west bank. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes the Jewish rabbi Aben Ezra, who explains vs. 11 to mean: “If the Gileadites, before I sent prophets to them, were worthless, surely they have become vanity, that is, instead of being morally better, they have become worse.” At the time of Hosea’s prophecy, King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria had already subjected Gilead and carried its inhabitants into captivity. *The Pulpit Commentary* further states: “The inhabitants of Gilgal on the west were no better than the Gileadites on the east of Jordan; the whole kingdom, in fact, was overrun with idolatry. The sin of the people of Gilgal did not consist in the animals offered, but in the unlawfulness of the place of sacrifice. The punishment of both Gilgal and Gilead is denounced in the following part of the verse.”

The heaps of stone were the stones that had been removed from the field in order to facilitate cultivation. Fields in enemy territory would sometimes be rendered unusable by throwing stones on them. The prophet Elisha foretold that the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom would inflict such punishment on Moab. We read: “You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones.”<sup>284</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes about the picture Hosea paints here: “And as worthless; nay, as fatal to piety as those stones are to the productiveness of the field. In the sight of God the altars are but so many rude heaps of stone.”

The apparent lack of context between vs. 12 and the rest of this section has puzzled many scholars. This is the second time Jacob, the people’s ancestor, is mentioned in this chapter. In verses 3 and 4, we find a reference to the spiritual crises in Jacob’s life, in vs. 12 his flight to Mesopotamia, the experience of humiliation after deceiving Isaac and Esau. There must be a link, however deeply hidden, between the two. Some commentators take a rather positive view of Jacob’s flight, as if he chose the poverty of slavery over the affluence of life at home. But Jacob fled for his life and his poverty was not one of choice. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Calvin’s explanation is at once correct and clear; it is the following: ‘Their father Jacob, who was he? what was his condition? He was a fugitive from his country. Even if he had always lived at home, his father was only a stranger in the land. But he was compelled to flee into Syria. And how splendidly did he live there? He was with his uncle, no doubt, but he was treated quite as meanly as any common slave: he served for a wife. And how did he serve? He was the man that tended the cattle.’ ”

Then there is the link with the following verse that recounts Israel’s exodus from Egypt under Moses, their rehabilitation from slavery. The father of the nation was a slave of Laban and his offspring became slaves of Pharaoh. Israel’s history testifies to the fact that God is a redeemer of slaves and that He frees His children from captivity. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests: “This fact would offer a glimmer of hope to the nation which was to go into captivity to Assyria. God had brought the earlier Israel back from Syria ... Again, after a time in a distant land, by a prophet (Moses) the Lord brought Israel out of

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<sup>281</sup> Num. 12:6-8

<sup>282</sup> Zech. 4:1

<sup>283</sup> Heb. 1:1,2

<sup>284</sup> II Kings 3:19

Egypt. The God who raised up Moses to be the leader of the Exodus, could raise up yet other prophets during the captivity to bring his people back to their homeland.” This would indicate that the fact that Israel went into captivity never to return was not according to the will of God; it must have been the result of Israel’s attitude of non-repentance during their captivity that made God close the door.

Vs. 14 proves that, although God was willing to forgive, Israel chose to bear her own guilt. “The guilt of his bloodshed” is literally “his blood.” The expression is the same as the one the people used during Jesus’ trial before Pilate: “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”<sup>285</sup> The last line of the chapter seems to contradict the thought that the captivity of the northern kingdom would be temporary as that of Judah would turn out to be. There remains, of course, the conflict between what God wishes man to do and what He knows he will do. This conflict continues throughout chapter thirteen.

*The Pulpit Commentary* introduces this chapter with the following remarks: “The first eight verses of this chapter form the premises from which the prophet, in the ninth verse, draws the conclusion that the conduct of Israel had been suicidal; that they had brought on themselves the calamities which they had experienced, and ultimately the ruin in which those calamities eventuated. The various particulars of their sin are enumerated, with the provocation caused or the punishment incurred by each. Thus the idolatry of Baal stripped them of the authority they once possessed, and issued in the dissolution of their state. After they had been to some small extent reclaimed from this national sin, and had somewhat retrieved their position, their perseverance in the calf-worship and the progress of their idolatrous practices provoked Jehovah so grievously as to threaten their sudden and entire destruction. Then their gross ingratitude to God for his great goodness and long-continued mercies, followed by pride and haughtiness and forgetfulness of the Most High, brought down on their guilty heads fearful vengeance. All these circumstances justify the conclusion to which he comes, that while God had been their Helper and Deliverer all along, they were chargeable with their own destruction.”

This section is wrought with linguistic problems. The NIV represents the consensus of most modern interpreters with the rendering of vs. 1 – “When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel.” This differs from the KJV’s reading: “When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel.” The Hebrew word, rendered “trembling” is *retheth*, which is found nowhere else in Scripture, nor any other Hebrew manuscript. Some commentators think that the words refer to the secession of the northern kingdom from the house of David. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, refused the request of the ten tribes for lowering of taxes, the record states: “When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: ‘What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!’”<sup>286</sup> Or Hosea’s words may simply refer to Ephraim’s dominant role in Israel among the surrounding nations in that period of world history. The kingdom fell from an exalted position to a state of idolatry and anarchy. The steps of decline can easily be traced from the sin of Jeroboam, who introduced the calves of Bethel and Dan to Ahab who allowed his Zidonian wife Jezebel to introduce the worship of Baal. From a break with God’s revelation in Jerusalem, the kingdom went into the deep darkness of demonic superstition. What began as a break with the house of David ended in a break with the God of David and caused their spiritual death.

The manufacture of idol statues developed into an elaborate art, practices by accomplished craftsmen. The words: “It is said of these people, ‘They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calf-idols’” poses another linguistic and interpretive problem. The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads: “Letthem kiss thecalves.” The rendering: “They who sacrifice men” is based upon the Septuagint. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* objects: “The former is open to the objection that human sacrifices were not offered to the calves (i.e., to Jehovah, as worshipped under the symbol of a calf), but only to Moloch, and that the worshippers of Moloch did not kiss calves.” All this is, of course, difficult to certify after so many centuries. There can be little doubt, though, that human sacrifices were brought in Israel in the service of idols. We read about King Ahaz: “He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.”<sup>287</sup> And

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<sup>285</sup> Matt. 27:25

<sup>286</sup> I Kings 12:16

<sup>287</sup> II Kings 16:3

by the mouth of Isaiah, God reproaches Judah: “You burn with lust among the oaks and under every spreading tree; you sacrifice your children in the ravines and under the overhanging crags.”<sup>288</sup>

The prophet uses four images to depict the character of the people and its consequences: mist, dew, chaff, and smoke. In an earlier chapter, he had used the first two in another context: “Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.”<sup>289</sup> Here the emphasis is not upon the nature of the people but upon the consequences of their disposition. Morning mist and early dew can be a blessing to the land but they are short-lived and fast disappearing. To compare persons or people to these phenomena of nature is not a compliment. The thought is that the people of Israel will disappear as fast as mist and dew when the sun shines upon them. Chaff and smoke do not even have the redeeming features of the former two elements. Chaff is the useless part in the process of winnowing the wheat and nothing is as unsubstantial as smoke. The four pictures are both a condemnation of character and a prediction of the future.

Verses 4-6 describe God’s unique relationship with Israel which should have been the basis of their intimate fellowship with the Lord. This is how God treated His people. Because of the way the people treated God this special relationship became the cause of their destruction. It is a terrible sin when a woman commits adultery. But for the man to whom the adulterous woman is married it means the ultimate offense. The more intimate the original relationship the more terrible the consequences. What made Gomer’s behavior so heartrending for Hosea was the fact that she was married to him. It is because of what God had done for Israel in bringing them out of Egypt and in shepherding them through the desert that He comes to them as a lion, a leopard, and a bear robbed of her cubs.

In referring to the exodus, Hosea quotes the first commandment of the Decalogue: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”<sup>290</sup> Israel’s sin is the most fundamental transgression that can be committed. The prophet also stresses that Israel’s offense dates back to the very beginning of their history. When they were still in the wilderness, subsisting on God’s supernatural provisions for them, they began to abandon God. Even before they entered the land God had promised to them, Moses predicted what would happen: “When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath.”<sup>291</sup> None of this, of course, provided an excuse for the people in Hosea’s day. Man has the choice to cut the bonds with the sins of previous generations. We all choose our own destination: liberty or death, heaven or hell.

Vs. 9 is rather cryptic in the original. The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads: “thou hast destroyed thyself; O Israel, but in me is thy help.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “All the disaster and destruction previously mentioned are charged on Israel’s misconduct; they had brought all upon themselves by their rebellion against Jehovah who would otherwise have been their Shield and Deliverer. The sense is well expressed by Calvin thus: ‘How comes it, and what is the reason, that I do not now help thee according to my usual manner? Thou hast indeed found me hitherto to be thy Deliverer... How comes it now that I have cast thee away, that thou criest in vain, and that no one brings thee any help? How comes it that thou art thus forsaken, and receivest no relief whatever from my hand, as thou hast been wont to do? And doubtless I should never be wanting to thee, if thou wouldest allow me; but thou closest the door against me, and by thy wickedness spurnest my favor, so that it cannot come to thee.’ ”

Hosea continues to reach back into Israel’s history to trace the roots of their apostasy. The topic of Israel’s kingdom is an ambiguous one in the Bible. From the very beginning, Israel was meant to be a theocracy, yet God made provisions for them to become a kingdom by laying down guidelines for the man who would eventually become king.<sup>292</sup> When Gideon was asked to become the king of Israel, he refused.

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<sup>288</sup> Isa. 57:5

<sup>289</sup> ch. 6:4

<sup>290</sup> Ex. 20:2,3

<sup>291</sup> Deut. 31:20,22

<sup>292</sup> See Deut. 17:14-20



We read: “The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us-you, your son and your grandson-because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon told them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.’ ” And when the people insisted that Samuel would anoint someone to become the king of Israel, God said to Samuel: “They have rejected me as their king.”<sup>293</sup> From the account in the Book of Samuel it is clear that God’s giving in to Israel’s request for a king was a form of punishment. God did not so much object to the form of government but to the reasons for the request: “Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”<sup>294</sup> The Israelites were not interested in maintaining that what distinguished them from other nations; they gladly surrendered to international peer pressure. Now, a theocracy is a very fragile form of government to maintain. It requires citizens who are willing to submit themselves to the will of God. Even in a monarchy one can more easily maintain one’s carnality.

*Barnes’ Notes* quotes Augustine, who commented on this verse: “God, when He is asked for ought amiss, shows displeasure, when He gives, has mercy, when He gives not.” “The devil was heard.” (in asking to enter into the swine) ‘the Apostle was not heard,’ (when he prayed that the messenger of Satan might depart from him) ... “God heard him whom He purposed to condemn; and He heard not him whom He willed to heal.” ... “God, when propitious, denies what we love, when we love amiss; when wrath, He gives to the lover, what he loves amiss. The Apostle says plainly, ‘ ‘God gave them over to their own hearts’ desire.’ ‘ ‘He gave them then what they loved, but, in giving, condemned them.” God did appoint Jeroboam, although not in the way in which Israel took him. Jeroboam and Israel took, as from themselves, what God appointed; and, so taking it, marred God’s gift.”

Vs. 10 forms the bridge from the preceding verses in to the conclusion of this chapter. God reminds the people that they had come to the dead end of the road they had chosen. The monarchy ended in failure and the kings they wanted “to lead [them] and to go out before [them] and fight [their] battles”<sup>295</sup> were nowhere to be found when the crisis came to a head. God promises them, however, that in the death of the kingdom, He is willing to reestablish His rule. The Kingdom of Heaven begins where earthly kingdoms fail. Some of this was foreshadowed in the rule of David, the rare exception in Israel’s history of the monarchy.

As God had allowed the sin of the Amorites to reach its full measure,<sup>296</sup> so did He allow Ephraim’s sin to pile up to the full. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “As a miser puts his money in a bag and seals it to prevent it being lost, so the Almighty had, as it were, hoarded Ephraim’s sin, putting it in a bag and tying it.” Job uses the same image to convey the opposite truth. We read: “My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover over my sin.”<sup>297</sup>

Hosea compares the unavoidability of judgment of sin with the birth of a child. Not without a touch of sarcasm, Jeremiah also compared God’s judgment to labor pains. We read: “Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale?”<sup>298</sup> Ever since man fell into sin, labor pains have accompanied birthing. This has become a law of nature. In a similar way, no sin can mature without meeting with ultimate punishment. In the words of James: “After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”<sup>299</sup>

Two persons are involved in every birth: the mother and the child, and a healthy birth requires the cooperation of both. In Hosea’s illustration, Israel plays both the role of the mother and of the child. A healthy birth is an occasion of pain and joy. Jesus uses the same image as Hosea to illustrate His suffering,

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<sup>293</sup> I Sam. 8:7

<sup>294</sup> I Sam. 8:5

<sup>295</sup> See I Sam. 8:20

<sup>296</sup> Gen. 15:16

<sup>297</sup> Job 14:17

<sup>298</sup> Jer. 30:6

<sup>299</sup> James 1:15

death, and resurrection: “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”<sup>300</sup>

The point of Hosea’s example is that there always is an element of hope in God’s judgment. God never announces judgment as an unavoidable doom; His warnings are acts of grace. When the labor pains of judgment fall upon a nation, there is still time for repentance. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “God in the case of His people suffers no abortion; He gives strength to bring forth, spiritually raising them by the Holy Spirit from the dark deadness of sin, and at last literally from the womb of the grave, 13:14; Isa 66:9).”

King Hezekiah used the same words as Hosea to implore God’s help when the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem. We read: “This is what Hezekiah says: ‘This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them.’”<sup>301</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Kimchi who has the following comment: “Because he has compared his pains to the pain of a woman in travail, he says, ‘The children are not wise,’ as if he said, ‘The coming generations, who have seen their fathers in affliction because of their iniquities, are not wise, and do not consider that distress has overtaken their fathers because of their iniquity; and turn not from the evil deeds of their fathers, but have done wickedness like them.’” He adds: “There are children lively by nature in their coming forth out of the womb; so also would these, if they were wise, not stay a single hour in distress, but immediately on returning to the Lord be delivered out of their distress.”

Labor pains are pains of life not of death. As we suggested above, the purpose for the announcement of justice is repentance, conversion, and rebirth. Calvin states about God’s relationship to death: “He is the death of death, the grave of the grave, the ruin of ruin, and the destruction of destruction.”

Vs. 14 is one of the most powerful statements in this book: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.” There are two Hebrew words in this verse that are pregnant with meaning: *padah* and *ga’al*. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* states about *padah*: “The word is connected with the laws of the firstborn. As a reminder of slaying all the Egyptian firstborn but sparing the Israelites, God retained an eternal claim on the life of all Israelite firstborn males, both of men and of cattle. The latter were often sacrificed, ‘but all the firstborn of my children I redeem,’ Ex 13:15. God accepted the separation of the tribe of Levi for liturgical service in lieu of all Israelite firstborn, Num 3:40ff.. However, the Israelite males still had to be ‘redeemed’ (*padah*) from this service by payment of specified ‘redemption money,’ Num 3:44-51.” The same *Dictionary* states about *ga’al* that it means: “to redeem, according to the Oriental law of kinship.” The word is used in Leviticus in connection with the law on redemption: “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.”<sup>302</sup>

So when God says that He will deliver Israel from the power of the grave, He states that He will act as their redeemer because of their blood relation with Him. Some commentators, however, take this statement as a Hebraic question: “>From the power of Sheol should I ransom them? From death deliver them?” And the answer, supposedly, is: Certainly not! The underlying problem with a positive interpretation of the words is that history does not bear out their prediction. The northern kingdom did in fact perish and was wiped from the surface of the earth. But within the context of the Bible as a whole, we can safely say that God looked, in this, beyond the history of Israel to the salvation of the world to the redemption by the Brother of all of mankind, Jesus Christ, to His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul certainly did not quote Hosea’s prophecy out of context when he stated in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’”<sup>303</sup> Paul must have had in mind Isaiah’s powerful prophecy about Calvary, about which God spoke: “On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that

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<sup>300</sup> John 16:21,23

<sup>301</sup> II Kings 19:3

<sup>302</sup> Lev. 25:25

<sup>303</sup> I Cor. 15:54,55

covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.<sup>304</sup>

It has been objected that a positive interpretation of this verse does not fit into the context of the chapter. Some commentators, however, believe that the general trend of Hosea's prophecy justifies an alteration between blessing and punishment. It is true that this is not inconsistent with the prophet's "choppy" style. But, more than that, the fact in this book God looks beyond Israel to the world at large, accounts for these changes between extremes.

*The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Pussy who pertinently remarked upon this verse: "God by his prophets mingles promises of mercy in the midst of his threats of punishment. His mercy overflows the bounds of the occasion upon which he makes it known. He had sentenced Ephraim to temporal destruction. This was unchangeable. He points to that which turns all temporal loss into gain, that eternal redemption. The words are the fullest which could have been chosen. The word rendered 'ransom' signifies rescued them by the payment of a price; the word rendered 'redeem' relates to one who, as the nearest of kin, had the right to acquire anything as his own by paying that price. Both words, in their exactest sense, describe what Jesus did, buying us with a price... and becoming our near kinsman by his incarnation... The words refuse to be tied down to a temporal deliverance. A little longer continuance in Canaan is not a redemption from the power of the grave; nor was Ephraim so delivered."

The prophet makes a play-on-words in vs. 15 by connecting the name Ephraim to his fruitfulness. The NIV's rendering: "Even though he thrives" is the translation of the Hebrew word *para*, which means: "to bear fruit." The reference is to Jacob's blessing of Joseph in which also a well is mentioned: "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall."<sup>305</sup> The hot east wind, Samoon, which is also mentioned in ch. 12, will change Ephraim's condition from a well-watered affluence to a parched desert. As in ch. 12:1, the Samoon is an image of the Assyrian army, on which the northern kingdom had initially pinned his hope but which became God's instrument for the destruction of Samaria.

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: "Shalmaneser began the siege of Samaria in 723 B.C. Its close was in 721 B.C., the first year of Sargon, who seems to have usurped the throne of Assyria while Shalmaneser was at the siege of Samaria. Hence, while 2 Kings 17:6 states, 'the king of Assyria took Samaria,' 2 Kings 18:10 says, 'at the end of three years they took it.' In Sargon's magnificent palace at Khorsabad inscriptions mention the number-27,280-of Israelites carried captive, by the founder of the palace, from Samaria and other places of Israel (George Vance Smith)."

The chapter closes with a prediction of the disaster the guilt of the people will bring upon the city of Samaria and upon the whole of the northern kingdom for which it stood: even the unborn generation would perish in a wave of inhumane cruelty. In this, Samaria would be paid back what it had done to others. The Scriptures tell us that Israel had practiced the kind of torture that would be carried out on her. We read in the Book of Second Kings: "At that time Menahem, starting out from Tirzah, attacked Tiphshah and everyone in the city and its vicinity, because they refused to open their gates. He sacked Tiphshah and ripped open all the pregnant women."<sup>306</sup>

It must have been difficult for the people who heard Hosea's words that such things could happen to their thriving city. Again, the announcement of the horrible things to come was meant as a warning. There was still time for repentance and return. The doom of Samaria was sealed because nobody took the Word of God by mouth of Hosea seriously enough to do something about it.

### 3. God's Promise to Restore Israel

14:1-9

***1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall!***

***2 Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips."***

***3 Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say 'Our God's ' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion."***

***4 "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them."***

<sup>304</sup> Isa. 25:7,8

<sup>305</sup> Gen. 49:22

<sup>306</sup> II Kings 15:16

**5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots;**

**6 his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.**

**7 Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.**

**8 O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me."**

**9 Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.**

This last chapter gives us a beautiful paradigm of repentance and conversion. We see in this last chapter another example of God's "wishful thinking." It is an invitation of the father of the prodigal for his son to come home. The difference between the figures in Jesus' parable<sup>307</sup> and Israel's history is that Israel refused to return to the father's house. That makes this chapter at the same time so wonderful and so tragic. It displays the fullness of God's generosity and willingness to forgive. It is an illustration of what God does for us in Jesus Christ, which John describes: "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."<sup>308</sup> It also illustrates man's awesome freedom to choose what is wrong.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The foregoing part of this book abounds with denunciations of punishment; this closing chapter superabounds with promises of pardon. Wave after wave of threatened wrath had rolled over Israel and come in unto their soul; now offer after offer of grace is made to them."

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* suggests that these words were addressed to Israel after it had already been taken into captivity. There seems, however, to be nothing in the text to support this supposition.

The Hebrew word for "return," *shuwbaah*, is, according to *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, "intensive [as the Hebrew letter *he* (h) in the imperative implies], implying God's strong desire for Israel's return. Return at once and completely." *The Commentary* continues: "'Unto' [*ad* ...] is literally, even up to the Lord; not merely toward the Lord." This is followed by a quote from The Jewish book, *Yomac*: "Great is repentance which makes men to reach quite up to the throne of glory."

What God wants to do with Israel is expressed in the command He gave earlier to Hosea to show his love again to Gomer, who was having affairs with other men at that time.<sup>309</sup>

The phrase: "Take words with you and return to the LORD" can be construed to mean that Israel's sin could not be atoned for without the clear formulation of a confession of sin. In their idolatry, the people had been accustomed to lavish presents upon their idols for the purpose of buying them off. The sacrifice of a bull or a goat, although still required, would be of no avail without a change of heart, expressed in words of apology. When we turn to God in repentance, He wants us to say: "I am sorry!"

As Jesus taught His disciples to pray, giving them The Lord's Prayer,<sup>310</sup> so Hosea passes on to the people the prayer God suggests for them. Prayer must be learned. New converts do not automatically become prayer warriors. Even mature believers do not always know how to approach the Lord. Paul's epistles are full of suggestions as to what to ask and how to ask it. In Romans, he states: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."<sup>311</sup> Extemporaneous prayers are not necessarily more powerful or more valuable than the prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer*. When God gives us a formula, we better use it.

<sup>307</sup> See Luke 15:11-31

<sup>308</sup> John 1:16 (KJV)

<sup>309</sup> See ch. 3:1,2

<sup>310</sup> See Matt. 6:9-13

<sup>311</sup> Rom. 8:26,27

The Hebrew text of the prayer is more interesting than most modern translations bring out. We read: "Takeaway all iniquity, and receive us graciously so will we render the calves of our lips." The Hebrew word *pariyim*, "calves" stands for sacrificial animals. In the Hebrew ritual of worship there was no place for words only. Praise was part of a sacrifice in which a living creature was put to death. The sacrificial animal took the place of the person who came to praise God. In this the person expressed the realization that he was the one who ought to die, but another creature substituted for him. This understanding lends immense depth to the confession of sin as well as to the act of praise. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to this when he writes: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name."<sup>312</sup>

The other side of the coin is the renunciation of confidence in anyone else but God. David sings in one of the psalms: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."<sup>313</sup> It used to be that people who wanted to become citizens of the United States of America had to pledge their allegiance by renouncing "all other potentates." God wanted Israel to make such a pledge, not only in their renunciation of other earthly powers but also in their reliance upon other spiritual authorities.

Idolatry is more complicated than it appears on the surface. Man wants to remain in control of his own life and destiny. An idol is a symbol of a higher authority but it can be manipulated. This may be the main urge for people who commit idolatry; it allows them to keep their hands on the controls (or so they think!). The fact that those who try to manipulate idols are, in fact, being manipulated themselves by evil spirits, usually remains hidden until it is too late. The renunciation of idols does not leave a person an orphan; "for in [God] the fatherless find compassion."

God promises to "heal their waywardness." The Hebrew word used is *meshuwbah*, which means "apostasy" and is usually rendered "backsliding." The Septuagint renders it: "I will heal their dwellings." In healing the wounds of the soul of the people God demonstrates His eternal spontaneous love. The word for "freely" is *nedabah*, which is the technical term for "a freewill offering." It is the same word used in Leviticus to designate a certain kind of sacrifice. We read, for instance: "If, however, his offering is the result of a vow or is a freewill offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day he offers it, but anything left over may be eaten on the next day."<sup>314</sup> In the context of Hosea's prophecy, it is God who brings the freewill offering for the healing of man's apostasy. This reminds us of Paul's exclamation of amazement: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>315</sup>

The turning away of God's anger expresses in Old Testament terms what Jesus states in John's Gospel: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."<sup>316</sup> And Paul writes to the Romans: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."<sup>317</sup>

God says: "I will be like the dew to Israel." This means that God Himself will be the blessing of Israel. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "In lands where there is little rain, the dew, falling copiously, fertilizes the earth, refreshes the languid plants, revives the face of nature, and makes all things grow. Thus the dew becomes the source of fruitfulness. So God, by his Spirit's grace, is the Source of Israel's spiritual fruitfulness."

Again, looking beyond the horizon of Israel's history, God "dreams" of what His new creation in Jesus Christ will be like. It will be like the blooming of a gorgeous lily, of the majestic and fragrant cedar of Lebanon, of the luxurious olive tree, and the luscious grapevine. God's vision drips with delight and freshness. It exudes healing, restoration, and relaxation. It draws us into the restoration of the soul in the green pastures and quiet waters of the Twenty-Third Psalm. It expresses to the full the real meaning of the name Ephraim – "fruitfulness." Israel's idolatry leads to death and barrenness; God's redeeming grace makes

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<sup>312</sup> Heb. 13:15

<sup>313</sup> Ps. 20:7

<sup>314</sup> Lev. 7:16

<sup>315</sup> Rom. 5:8

<sup>316</sup> John 5:24

<sup>317</sup> Rom. 8:1

her into a tree, an evergreen, or as the Hebrew word *berowsh* also implies, a musical instrument. If the lily speaks of beauty and purity, the tree, specifically the cedar of Lebanon, suggests permanence.

There is some confusion about the meaning of the words: "Men will dwell again in his shade." Some scholars think that, if the state of Israel is likened to a tree, the men who dwell in his shade are the Israelites themselves. It seems more logical to interpret this as meaning that Israel will again become a source of salvation for the whole world. As Jesus stated to the Samaritan woman: "Salvation is from the Jews."<sup>318</sup>

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* becomes ecstatic about this verse. The dignified author exclaims: "What a glorious prophecy! What a wonderful prophet! How sublime, how energetic, how just! The great master prophet, Isaiah, alone could have done this better. And these promises are not for Israel merely after the flesh; they are for all the people of God. We have a lot and portion in the matter; God also places his love upon us."

Modern translations put the words "what more have I to do with idols?" in the mouth of God. The KJV reads: "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" The latter seems more logical. The reading of TLB seems quite acceptable: "O Ephraim! Stay away from idols!"

The verse that concludes Hosea's prophecy asks the question: "Who is wise? ... Who is discerning?" *Barnes' Notes* quotes Jerome's comment on a verse in Eccl. 3:21: "The word 'who' is always taken, not for what is impossible, but for what is difficult. So Isaiah saith, 'Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed? (Isa 53:1).'" Wisdom in the Bible is always linked to man's moral behavior. The angel said to Daniel: "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand."<sup>319</sup> Those whose lives demonstrate that they walk in close fellowship with the Lord will understand the ways of the Lord.

The prophet's last statement, obviously, refers to the whole of his prophecy. In their effort to justify themselves, the people of Israel had argued that God was not treating them right. Hosea not only invites the people to understand that what is happening to them in their being led away into captivity is the result of their idolatry and immorality, but also that God is justified in doing this to them.

A human reaction to "the ways of the Lord" is often that God could have done better. Man likes to set himself up as a judge to evaluate and criticize what God does on earth. Part of this attitude is due to the fact that we are unwilling to assume responsibility for our actions. We tend to blame God for the evil we commit ourselves. God did not invent the Nazi gas chambers or the killing field of Cambodia. He is not the Allah who told terrorists to fly airplanes into the World Trade Center buildings in New York City. All those horrors are human inventions. God did not inspire Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery, but He used it to achieve His goal. God's truth marches on through crimes, and wars, and inhuman cruelties, but it cannot be blamed for them. It takes superhuman wisdom to understand that what God does in the circumstances man has created for Him is the only possible way for a holy God to act. David's conclusion was the deduction of a wise man when he wrote in one of his psalms: "All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD."<sup>320</sup>

God's ways are not for us to judge, they are for us to walk in, to follow!

Toccoa Falls, GA 9/10/03

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<sup>318</sup> John 4:22

<sup>319</sup> Daniel 12:10

<sup>320</sup> Ps. 138:4,5 (NKJV)