

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

Authorship: Hos. 1:1 identifies the author as “Hosea, the son of Beer-i.” Apart from his father’s identification, nothing else is known about Hosea’s lineage, unless Beer-i is to be identified with the Beerah of 1 Chron. 5:6. If these are the same, Hosea would be of the tribe of Reuben. Although speculative, this would confirm his northern roots. Hosea’s uniqueness is that he was a prophet from the north ministering to the north. Hosea’s name means “salvation.”

Date: The list of kings in Hos. 1:1 spans just over a century—a period of time obviously longer than Hosea’s ministry. The internal evidence suggests that Hosea’s ministry began prior to Jeroboam II’s death in 753 BC and ended around 725 BC, after Hezekiah’s ascension but before Samaria’s fall. Hosea’s ministry was in part contemporary with Isaiah and Micah, both of whom ministered to the southern kingdom, and Amos, who although from the south preached principally to the northern kingdom.

Although Hosea’s ministry commenced during a time of prosperity during the administration of Jeroboam II, that prosperity soon gave way to decline. The history of Hosea’s world delineates the fulfillment of his prophecy that the Lord would bring first the demise of Jehu’s dynasty and then the end of the whole kingdom of Israel (1:4), and that He would do so at the hand of the Assyrians (11:5). Hosea lived and ministered during most of that history and, therefore, preached to a people on the brink of national disaster. There was a sense of urgency to his message, but the nation was oblivious. What the nation experienced in the swirling demise of their national sovereignty and standard of living consistently affirmed the veracity and authority of Hosea’s message.

Ironically, the tragic consequences of Israel’s rejection of Hosea’s message anticipated the grace of the gospel. The territory of Israel that first experienced God’s judgment (all the land of Naphtali, 2 Kings 15:29) was by God’s grace the first region of Israel to witness the ministry of Christ (Matt. 4:12–16). The darkness of Hosea’s day would give way to the light of Christ. The time of darkness was a providentially ordered step toward the fullness of time in which the Light would shine.

Theme: God’s love spurned but constant.

Purpose: To highlight God’s unfailing love that guarantees His covenant faithfulness both in terms of judgment and mercy.

Synopsis: *Hosea’s Contribution to Redemptive Revelation*

The message of marriage is an integral part of the prophecy of Hosea. God intended Hosea’s family life to be a symbol, a visible picture or object lesson, of the message he was to preach to Israel. Hos. 3:1 is the key verse of the book and explicitly links Hosea’s marriage to Gomer with God’s marriage to Israel. Hosea’s relationship with Gomer and God’s relationship with Israel were initiated by love, spurned by sin, and maintained by loyalty. Hosea’s constant love and loyalty to Gomer was a beautiful picture of the Lord’s unfailing love and loyalty to Israel. Gomer’s unfaithfulness to Hosea was a tragically clear picture of Israel’s treacherous unfaithfulness to the Lord. On several levels, Hosea’s experience parallels God’s relationship with Israel, which in turn is paradigmatic of God’s salvific acts for the church.

Major Problem of Interpretation: Hosea's marriage to Gomer, crucial to the message of the book, constitutes a major problem for interpreters. The crux of the problem concerns the initial command of God to marry a wife of whoredoms (1:2). On the surface this creates a moral and ethical dilemma because it seems to counter the clear instructions and restrictions for marriage that God gave to priests prohibiting them from marrying harlots (Lev. 21:7,13). If it would be a disgrace for a priest to marry a harlot, it would seem to follow that it would be a disgrace for a prophet as well. In addition, Deut. 22:13,20–21 sentences to death any woman proven to be unchaste at the time of marriage. The dilemma, therefore, is twofold: Would the Lord lower the standards for a prophet, and would He overlook the impurity of the wife of whoredom?

The solutions to the problem fall into two major categories: those that regard the marriage as hypothetical and those that regard the marriage as literal.

Hypothetical Marriage

The hypothetical view denies a real historical marriage between Hosea and Gomer and interprets Hosea's use of the marriage imagery as simply a means of figuratively communicating God's relationship to Israel and Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to God. According to this view, the best way to resolve the moral and theological tension is to disallow the fact but not the significance of the marriage. The marriage conveyed a message even if there were no actual nuptials. It is as though Hosea introduced his ministry with a "what if."

Literal Marriage

There are several versions of the actual marriage interpretation, all agreeing that a real marriage took place but disagreeing on the nature or timing of the harlotry ascribed to Gomer.

First, *the harlot view* maintains that Gomer was in fact impure, perhaps a temple prostitute, when Hosea married her. This view recognizes the moral difficulty but suggests that for the sake of the message, God overruled His previously stated standards. Hosea's marriage to the harlot would emphasize God's gracious love for an undeserving people. Gomer's continuing adultery was an affront to Hosea's kindness as Israel's was to God's.

Second, *the idolatress view* claims that Gomer was an idol worshipper when she married Hosea. The word "harlotry" would then refer to spiritual rather than sexual fornication.

Third, *the proleptic view* claims that Gomer was sexually pure at the beginning of the marriage but soon became unfaithful. Prolepsis is the use of a descriptive word in anticipation of a later occurrence that will make the term appropriate. Accordingly, though pure at marriage, Gomer was identified as a "wife of harlotry" in anticipation of what she would become. God, who knows the end from the beginning, could certainly reveal to Hosea what his bride would do before she actually committed acts of fornication.

Fourth, *the hybrid view*, which is followed in these notes, is a cross between the harlot view that takes the initial command at face value and the proleptic view that postpones Gomer's infidelity. The word whoredoms is an abstract plural that would more likely describe an inner characteristic than an outward behavior. It most likely refers to Gomer's latent bent towards immorality that surfaced not long after the marriage. God revealed to Hosea up front something about Gomer's inner self that would potentially jeopardize the sanctity of the marriage. At the beginning of the marriage she was innocent of any physical fornication, but Hosea knew both what she was capable of doing and most likely would do. It was just a matter of time before propensity became practice. This is a key link to the spiritual parallel for believers: God loves us in spite of what He knows about us.

- Outline:**
- I. Introduction (1:1)
 - II. Hosea's Personal Life: His Symbolic Message (1:2—3:5)
 - A. The Marriage and Children (1:2—2:1)
 1. Marriage to Gomer as Symbol of Nation's Sin (1:2)
 2. Birth and Names of Children as Symbols of Judgment (1:3–9)
 3. Renaming of Children as Symbol of Hope (1:10—2:1)
 - B. Application of Hosea's Family Life to Israel (2:2–23)
 1. Sin and Punishment (2:2–13)
 2. Restoration (2:14–23)
 - C. Hosea's Reunion with Gomer and Application to Israel (3:1–5)
 1. The Terms for Reunion (3:1–3)

2. The Application to the Nation (3:4–5)
- III. Hosea's Prophetic Discourses: His Direct Message (4:1—14:9)
 - A. Synopsis of the Charges against the Nation (4:1–5)
 - B. Sin of Ignorance and Statement of Hope (4:6—6:3)
 1. Deserved Destruction of Nation (4:6–19)
 2. Guilt of Nation Follows Guilt of Leaders (5:1–7)
 3. Doom of Nation (5:8–15)
 4. Statement of Hope and Invitation to Repent (6:1–3)
 - C. Sin of Unfaithfulness and Statement of Hope (6:4—11:11)
 1. Refusal to Repent of Manifold Sins (6:4—8:14)
 - a) Transgression of the Covenant (6:4–11)
 - b) Obstinacy (7:1–16)
 - c) Idolatry (8:1–14)
 2. Deserved Judgment (9:1—10:15)
 - a) Dispersion (9:1–5)
 - b) Barrenness (9:6–17)
 - c) Destruction (10:1–15)
 3. Statement of Hope Springing from God's Love (11:1–11)
 - D. Sin of Faithlessness and Statement of Hope (11:12—14:9)
 1. Sin Described (11:12—13:16)
 2. Repentance and Hope (14:1–9)

HOSEA

CHAPTER 1

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

2 The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing* from the LORD.

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of

Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.

4 And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little *while*, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

5 And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

6 ¶ And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And *God* said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.

Chapter 1: Hosea's family life is used as a portrait of God's relationship with Israel.

INTRODUCTION (1:1)

1:1 *The word of the Lord that came.* Hosea's timeline sets his ministry in a context of religious pluralism. His parish was ecumenical in the worst way: the state religion inaugurated by Jeroboam I was entrenched and Baal worship lingered. That God raised up Hosea to minister in such a day should give hope to Christians who live in a world that is at odds with the exclusive claims of Christianity. It should be our prayer that God would raise up ministers today with prophetic boldness to declare His Word. In His grace, God has given His Word as the answer to any crisis. The authority and relevance of God's Word is not restricted by either time or borders.

HOSEA'S PERSONAL LIFE: HIS SYMBOLIC MESSAGE (1:2—3:5)

The Marriage and Children (1:2—2:1)

Marriage to Gomer as Symbol of Nation's Sin (1:2)

1:2 *wife of whoredoms.* Whoredoms most likely refer to the inward propensity and bent to fornication rather than the actual transgression (see Introduction: Major Problem of Interpretation). Hosea's bride, therefore, was physically pure at the time of the marriage, but the issues of her heart would soon surface. God revealed to Hosea the nature of Gomer's heart, something that otherwise only God would have known. That Hosea married Gomer in spite of what he knew about her parallels God's grace in loving His people in spite of their sins. *children of whoredoms.* Hosea uses a figure of speech involving ellipsis (zeugma) that requires supplying a verb like "beget" before children, which would place the birth of the children after the marriage. The children born subsequently to the marriage shared their mother's wicked heart, which only added to Hosea's grief. The three children symbolize aspects of God's judgment upon the nation (see explanations below). *for the land hath committed.* The Hebrew says, "because the land is certainly committing fornication from after the Lord." Hosea's generation had forsaken the Lord and

owned no claim to God's promise. Consequently, judgment was inevitable.

Birth and Names of Children as Symbols of Judgment (1:3–9)

1:3 *bare him a son.* The Hebrew says literally, "to him," indicating that Hosea was the father of the first child.

1:4 *Jezreel* means "God scatters." The focus here is not on the meaning of the name but on the historical significance of the location, a place frequently associated with murders (1 Kings 21:8–14), assassinations (2 Kings 9:24), and even massacres (2 Kings 10:11). Jezreel pictures the irony of judgment, particularly upon the dynasty of Jehu. Jehu's dynasty commenced with his execution of Ahab's house in Jezreel. According to 2 Kings 10:30, God commended him for his actions. So although Hos. 1:4 places no blame on Jehu, it does preview the bloodshed that would end Jehu's dynasty. Ironically, what was an act of obedience that initiated his house will become an act of punishment because of sins as heinous as those associated with Ahab. *avenge the blood.* The word "avenge" means to inspect or give attention. In Hebrew, "blood" is plural, which always refers to bloodshed and often bloodguilt. God will see the guilt of bloodshed that took place at Jezreel to be upon Jehu's house. Jehu's dynasty will end with the same kind of violence as Ahab's. The Jezreel symbolism juxtaposes two aspects of the coming judgment in one predictive context. First, the Lord announces the end of Jehu's dynasty, which from its inception was limited to four generations (2 Kings 10:30). That prophecy was fulfilled when Shallum assassinated Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8–10). Second, God announces the fall of the whole northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:6,23). Forty-two years separated the two components of the prophecy.

1:5 *break the bow . . . in the valley of Jezreel.* By metonymy, *bow* represents the totality of Israel's military arsenal and strength. Both historically and prophetically, the valley of Jezreel has strategic importance militarily. Megiddo is a key site commanding the valley, which accounts for its identification as the valley of Armageddon.

1:6 *Lo-ruhamah* means "no-mercy." The absence of any reference to Hosea may indicate this child was born through for-

7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

8 ¶ Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.

9 Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

10 ¶ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.

11 Then shall the children of Judah and the chil-

dren of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

CHAPTER 2

SAY ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ru-hamah.

2 Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts;

3 Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

nication. The symbolism regarding judgment is transparent; it marks the forfeiture of God's compassionate pity.

1:9 *Lo-ammi* means "not my people." The absence of any reference to Hosea may indicate this child also was born through fornication. The symbolism regarding judgment is transparent; the Lord will deal with them as though they were heathens. Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi together symbolize the tragedy of the judgment. The Lord would show no mercy in the national disaster and would seemingly set aside the covenant, as they would no longer be His people. Although the covenant is ultimately unconditional because of Christ, individual participation was always conditioned on or, perhaps better, evidenced by faith in the promise. *your God*. The word *God* is not in the Hebrew, but was added by the translators. The addition of *God* in the statement *I will not be your God* logically and contextually corresponds to "not my people" as the opposite of the normal "your God . . . my people" covenant formula. However, the Hebrew text could be rendered either, "and I myself will not be for you" or "even I, I will not be yours." God's not being for them would make them susceptible to any and all opposition. Judgment was inevitable. All of this is in keeping with the covenant curses and blessings of Deut. 27–28.

Renaming of Children as Symbol of Hope (1:10—2:1)

1:10 *Yet the number*. Judgment was coming, but restoration was to follow. Peter recognized the full gospel implication of this curse reversal when he applied the promise to believers of the New Testament dispensation (1 Peter 2:9–10).

1:11 *one head*. This looks to a time when the divided kingdom again becomes a united monarchy under the leadership of one head. That one head must be the Messiah-King.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 1

1. The whole message of Hosea ought to generate thoughts of the wonder of God's gracious love for His people. The apostle John declared that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). There is more talk and less understanding about God's love than almost any other divine attribute. Most people define God's love based on their own experience of love as an emotional attachment to something attractive. Even the Christian's love for God is generated by attraction to Him. John says that "we love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). On this reasoning, people feel that God will love them because they are attractive to God. God, however, does not love because something in the object is worthy or attractive. God loves because He is love. His love springs from His character rather than the character of those He loves. He loves us not because

we are what we are, but in spite of what we are. Every Christian must realize that he does not deserve God's favor. It is only possible because God in love sent His Son, the only One worthy of the Father's love, to be the Redeemer of an unlovely people. This realization should arouse humility and gratitude in all who have experienced God's free love revealed and given in Jesus Christ. The prophecy of Hosea is a vivid illustration of the nature of God's free love to an undeserving people.

2. Throughout Scripture, God uses marriage as a choice symbol of His relationship with the church, the bride of Christ. This is why every Christian marriage ought to be a living gospel sermon. The marriage analogy puts Israel's apostasy in perspective. The marriage bond assumes, indeed demands, that there be an exclusive union between husband and wife. That must be maintained and guarded. Adultery violates that bond and is a most serious offense against both the spouse and against God (Ex. 20:14). Faithfulness and mutual loyalty between husband and wife are basic to marriage. Unfaithfulness and disloyalty threaten and jeopardize the union. Not surprisingly, then, Scripture often describes Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord in terms of harlotry or spiritual adultery—a tragically vivid picture of apostasy.

Chapter 2: God outlines His plan to restore His wayward people by isolating them, bringing them to poverty, and alluring them with the prospect of renewed covenant mercy.

2:1 *Ammi . . . Ru-hamah*. God's withdrawal of His mercy (the significance of Lo-ruhamah) was with a view to the declaration of His mercy again. Though God disowned His people (the significance of Lo-ammi), He reversed this by His announcement that once again He would own them (my people). Again see the covenant theology of Deut. 27–28.

Application of Hosea's Family Life to Israel (2:2–23)

Sin and Punishment (2:2–13)

2:2 Hosea boldly draws the connection between Gomer's adultery and Israel's. *Plead* is usually a legal term designating an accusation or grievance, but here it includes the exhortation to reverse the cause of the grievance, the spiritual adultery. The mother/wife represents Israel whose transgression severed the relationship with the Lord. But He sought to restore it.

2:3 *Lest I strip . . . and slay her with thirst*. Both the imagery of nakedness and barrenness/thirst picture the deprivation from the necessities of life.

4 And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they *be* the children of whoredoms.

5 For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

6 ¶ Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

7 And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find *them*: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then *was it* better with me than now.

8 For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, *which* they prepared for Baal.

9 Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax *given* to cover her nakedness.

10 And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand.

11 I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

12 And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These *are* my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a

forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.

13 And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.

14 ¶ Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.

15 And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

16 And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, *that* thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

17 For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.

18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and *with* the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.

19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

2:6–8 *I will hedge up.* God would isolate the nation so that they would recognize His superiority and return to Him.

2:8 *Baal.* Israel committed spiritual whoredoms by switching their devotion from the Lord to Baal. Baal is not so much a proper name of a god as it is a descriptive title, meaning “master,” which designated an imagined god to be the head over other imagined gods. There was a commonality in Baal mythology, although the specific identity of the designated Baal would differ from place to place: Hadad, Dagon, Chemosh, etc. Baal worship was essentially a fertility cult involving various rigmoroles of rituals—often lewd ones—to insure the productivity of the land in each agricultural cycle. It was a religion for profit, worshipping in order to procure things for living. The god whom Israel regarded as their Baal is not specified; neither is it relevant. What is significant is that under the influence of their pagan neighbors and out of selfish motives, they worshipped a god of their own conception.

2:9–13 *take away my corn.* God would impoverish them in order to jog their memory of Him and teach them to depend utterly on Him.

Restoration (2:14–23)

2:14–23 Having gotten their attention through isolation and impoverishment, God would irresistibly entice them to a renewed relationship so that they would really know Him. It appeared that Israel had gone so far away from God that restoration was impossible. But grace is greater than sin and reaches as far as God’s intent to maintain His covenant. What Hosea describes corresponds to Jeremiah’s new covenant (Jer.

31:31–34). The focus is on a spiritual, unbreakable covenant. Unlike the covenant at Sinai that marked the birth of the nation, the new covenant is individual, internal, irresistible, and irreversible.

2:15 *I will give her her vineyards.* This refers to restoration in the land of promise. The land was God’s gift, and enjoying the gift was contingent upon faith and obedience. It also draws a line directly to Christ since dwelling in the land was the experience of rest—a physical rest that was symbolic of the greater spiritual rest that is found solely in Jesus Christ. *The valley of Achor* was a symbol of judgment since the day of Achan’s execution after his sin at Jericho (Josh. 7:26). *door of hope.* Judgment would give way to restoration. *she shall sing.* The Hebrew root translated *sing* could also be rendered answer or respond. Either rendering suggests the kind of joy that accompanies the first experiences of grace.

2:16 *Ishi* means “my husband” whereas *Baali* means “my master.” The change of names reflects a change of attitude toward the Lord.

2:17 *Baalim* is the plural of Baal.

2:19–20 The Lord’s announcement of the renewed marriage reveals that God’s love is not impetuous but is based in God’s eternal purpose according to His perfect *righteousness*. It is God’s covenant loyalty or *lovingkindness* that resolves the apparent tension between divine righteousness and justice with their demands of perfection and God’s compassion and faithfulness displayed to those incapable of meeting the demands. There is hope for those prone to wander because the lovingkindness of God endures forever (Ps. 136).

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth;

22 And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to *them which were* not my people, Thou *art* my people; and they shall say, *Thou art* my God.

CHAPTER 3

THEN said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of *her* friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.

2 So I bought her to me for fifteen *pieces* of silver,

and *for* an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley:

3 And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for *another* man: so *will* I also *be* for thee.

4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and *without* teraphim:

5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

CHAPTER 4

HEAR the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the

2:21 *Hear* is literally “answer” and has the idea of responding to something.

2:22–23 The prophet describes the blessing in terms of the children’s names. Playing on the name *Jezreel* (“God scatters”), the Lord says that He will *sow . . . in the earth*. This is not a scattering in judgment but an expansion in blessing, an advancing of the kingdom. Similarly, playing on Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, “no mercy” receives *mercy* and “not my people” becomes *my people*. Again see the curse reversal as part of the covenant theology of Deut. 27–28 as well as Peter’s application to all believers (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 2

1. God’s plan for restoring His sinning people entailed discipline. Love sometimes requires what is not pleasant for the welfare of those loved. According to Scripture, this discipline, although unpleasant, is evidence of love. See Prov. 13:24. We usually call this tough love, but it is love nonetheless. Parents can use this as opportunity to instruct their children.
2. The change of the children’s names illustrating Hosea’s judgment/hope cycle exemplifies one of the great “buts” of God’s grace, paralleling Paul’s great “but God” of Eph. 2:4–5. Were it not for these “buts” of grace, there would be no hope of salvation for any. This provides opportunity for reflection and thanksgiving for the personal evidences of God’s grace. Asking the question “Where would I be, apart from God’s grace” would be a good way to begin the meditation.

Chapter 3: Hosea’s reunion with Gomer points to God’s restoration of Israel.

Hosea’s Reunion with Gomer and Application to Israel (3:1–5)

The Terms for Reunion (3:1–3)

3:1 *beloved of her friend*. The identity of the friend may refer to one of Gomer’s paramours but more likely to Hosea himself. If Hosea, it would underscore his constant love for her in spite of her unfaithfulness. That parallels the gospel truth of God’s constant love for His people in spite of their failures. *Adulteress* is actually a verbal form indicating that she had become completely enslaved to this licentious behavior.

3:2–3 *I bought her . . . Thou shalt abide*. Who received the

payment and the amount are incidental. The point is that Hosea did what was necessary to restore Gomer and to impose on her restrictions designed to maintain her purity from that point on.

The Application to the Nation (3:4–5)

3:5 The referent of *the LORD their God, and David their king* is the ideal David, David’s greater Son, the Messiah. The *and* is explicative and could be translated “the Lord their God, even David their king.” This not only identifies Christ as the object of seeking faith but also links His deity and humanity. The Messiah is the God-Man.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 3

1. Hosea’s reunion with Gomer provides another reminder of the wonder of God’s gracious love. Gomer gives hope to every sinner. It is not surprising that a book about marriage and family should refer so often to love. The root word for love occurs almost twenty times in Hosea. What is surprising is that the majority of occurrences refer to Israel’s illicit love associated with their spiritual adultery and pagan worship. This only highlights the wonder of God’s love for them (3:1; 11:1,4; 14:4) and points to the real issue of love. The marriage/family motif certainly speaks of the natural affection that ought to be the experience of every family. Yet the word for love goes far beyond expressions of affection. This love is moved by the will. It designates a compelling inclination of the heart to a chosen object. From the outset, God’s love was a matter of choice; He decides to love His people, and the reason for that loving choice is not in their attractiveness or worthiness. God’s love is totally of grace. The motive of God’s gracious, electing love is within Himself, not in the objects of His choice. This is what makes grace so amazing.

HOSEA’S PROPHETIC DISCOURSES: HIS DIRECT MESSAGE (4:1—14:9)

Chapter 4: The Lord indicts Israel and begins to list the charges against them in terms of covenant violations and ignorance of God.

Synopsis of the Charges against the Nation (4:1–5)

4:1 *the LORD hath a controversy*. Using the imagery of the

inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

4 Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people *are* as they that strive with the priest.

5 Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.

6 ¶ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

7 As they were increased, so they sinned against me: *therefore* will I change their glory into shame.

8 They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity.

9 And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings.

10 For they shall eat, and not have enough: they

shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD.

11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

12 ¶ My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused *them* to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.

13 They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof *is* good: therefore your daughters shall commit whoredom, and your spouses shall commit adultery.

14 I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people *that* doth not understand shall fall.

15 ¶ Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, *yet* let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth.

16 For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer: now the LORD will feed them as a lamb in a large place.

17 Ephraim *is* joined to idols: let him alone.

court, the Lord summons Israel and brings charges against them. In the following chapters, the Lord irrefutably proves their guilt, justly pronounces sentence against them, and graciously offers restoration. *no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge.* The threefold charge is summed up by the absence of covenant fidelity in word and deed, of covenant loyalty, and of covenant experience.

4:2 *By swearing.* The general accusations of no truth, mercy, or knowledge are specified in terms of violating the moral law summed up in the Decalogue. By the literary device *brachylogy* (a partial list to designate totality), the five designated violations of law include the transgression of the whole law. This parallels James's statement in James 2:10–11.

Sin of Ignorance and Statement of Hope (4:6—6:3)

Deserved Destruction of Nation (4:6–19)

4:6 *lack of knowledge.* The implication is that had they known God, Israel would have avoided the sins and consequent judgment. There is something about knowing God experientially that produces behavior that is pleasing to Him. To know God is to fear God. To fear God is to love God. To love God is to keep His commandments. *forgotten the law . . . I will also forget.* Forgetting involves a conscious and willful decision to refuse to acknowledge or think about something. It equates with rejection.

4:8 *They eat up the sin.* Eating sin could refer to consuming the sin offering, but the parallelism to setting their heart on iniquity suggests that sin was the object of their diet, what they thrived on. *they set their heart.* Setting the heart is literally lifting up the soul (or entire being), an idiom expressing dependence. Sin and iniquity were their sustenance.

4:12 *ask counsel at their stocks.* Rather than relying on the Lord and His prophets for revelation, the nation turns to its wooden idols.

4:13 *tops of the mountains.* A reference to the high places associated with pagan shrines.

4:14 *I will not punish.* The withholding of punishment from the daughters and spouses does not imply divine indifference to sin but rather underscores the principal blame for the transgression to be on the males. This is suggested from the causal clause, *for themselves* (masculine gender) *are separated with whores.*

4:15 *Gilgal* and *Beth-aven* were sites associated with Israel's idolatrous worship. Ironically, Beth-aven, meaning "house of idolatry" is the same place as Bethel, meaning "house of God."

4:16 *Israel slideth back.* To slide back or backslide literally is to be stubborn or rebellious.

4:18 *Their drink is sour.* The word sour literally is "turn aside." It could refer either to the drink turning aside in the sense of being depleted (gone) or turning bad (sour). The drink was part of the idolatrous worship and by synecdoche (part for the whole) designates the totality of the ritualistic debauchery. *her rulers with shame do love, Give ye.* The Hebrew is difficult. The idea is that Israel's rulers, literally referred to as shields, were given over to loving shame.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 4

1. As a gospel preacher, Hosea spoke to sin head on. Preaching the gospel always entails preaching against sin, warning of sin's consequences, and announcing sin's remedy. In order to highlight the heinous nature and seriousness of sin, surveying Hosea's terms for sin would be in order. Use this synopsis to guide your meditation. Hosea's sermon provides a casebook of sin. Most of the standard Old Testament words for sin are scattered throughout the prophecy in addition to others that are specifically suited to Hosea's focus on the breach of covenant.

18 Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers *with* shame do love, Give ye.

19 The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

CHAPTER 5

HEAR ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment *is* toward you, because ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.

2 And the revolvers are profound to make slaughter, though I *have been* a rebuker of them all.

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me: for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, *and* Israel is defiled.

4 They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms *is* in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD.

5 And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face:

therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.

6 They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find *him*; he hath withdrawn himself from them.

7 They have dealt treacherously against the LORD: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.

8 Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah, *and* the trumpet in Ramah: cry aloud *at* Beth-aven, after thee, O Benjamin.

9 Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke: among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be.

10 The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: *therefore* I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.

11 Ephraim *is* oppressed *and* broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment.

12 Therefore *will* I *be* unto Ephraim as a moth,

Sin: The word most often translated as “sin” occurs in either verb or noun form at least eleven times (Hos. 4:7,8; 8:11 [twice],13; 9:9; 10:8,9; 12:8; 13:2,12). This is the word that provides the image of missing a target. It vividly pictures sin as the failure to conform to the standard of God’s righteous and inflexible law.

Iniquity: The noun usually translated “iniquity” occurs at least as frequently (Hos. 4:8; 5:5; 7:1; 8:13; 9:7,9; 10:13; 12:8; 13:12; 14:1,2). This word pictures sin as twisted, perverted, or deviant behavior. Significantly, this is the principal word that the Old Testament uses to designate the guilt of sin, and sometimes—although rarely—even the punishment of sin. Thus, when this word occurs, the interpreter must determine whether the text is referring to the actual sin or the guilt that results from the sin.

Evil: Another commonly used word for sin usually translated as “evil” or “wickedness” occurs eight times (Hos. 7:1,2,3,15; 9:15 [twice]; 10:15 [twice]). This word pictures sin as disastrous or calamitous behavior: sin is destructive.

Rebellion, Harlotry, Etc.: Other key words, such as “to rebel,” occur less frequently (Hos. 7:13; 8:1; 14:9); some contextually specific words, such as “to play the harlot” and “to commit adultery occur more frequently (Hos. 1:2 [twice]; 2:2,4,5; 4:12 [twice]; 5:3,4; 6:10; 9:1 and Hos. 2:2; 3:1; 4:2,13,14; 7:4 respectively). But all are instructive, whether picturing sin as corruption (Hos. 9:9); reproach (Hos. 12:14); shameful behavior (Hos. 2:5); lewdness (Hos. 2:10); deceit (Hos. 6:8; 10:8; 12:12); or stubbornness (Hos. 9:15).

- That Israel was punished in part for a lack of knowledge of God is a sober reminder regarding the importance of knowing God as directive for behavior that is pleasing to Him. Has knowing God changed your life?

Chapter 5: Israel’s sin includes both the religious and civil authorities and extends to the entire congregation.

Guilt of Nation Follows Guilt of Leaders (5:1–7)

5:1 *O priests . . . O house of the king.* Both the religious and civil leaders are indicted for their entrapment (*snare*) of the

people, compared to bird traps set on high spots. *Mizpah* is a mountain located near Gilead in the Transjordan and *Tabor* the conspicuous hill in the valley of Jezreel.

5:3 *Ephraim* equals Israel. Ephraim, the most notable of the northern tribes, stands for the whole nation.

5:4 *they have not known the LORD.* Knowing God involves both intellectual and experimental aspects. Ignorance of God includes both the lack of apprehension of the truth about God and the nonexistence of any personal relationship with Him. Spiritual ignorance of God and His law is never an excuse; it is, rather, reason for condemnation. So if not knowing God is the problem, knowing Him is the solution. And there is no true knowledge of God apart from Christ.

5:6 *they shall not find.* A solemn reminder of the urgency of seeking the Lord when He allows Himself to be found (Isa. 55:6). Tragically, a time comes when He does not allow Himself to be found (Prov. 1:28); consequentially, there is always an urgency attending invitations to repent.

5:7 *They have dealt treacherously.* Israel’s sin is described in terms of marriage violation. Dealing treacherously refers to marital unfaithfulness; *strange children* refer to those born illegitimately. *Month* is literally new moon and refers to the holy day in which special sacrifices were to be offered (Num. 28:11–15). To say it would *devour them* is a vivid way of highlighting the danger of heartless, external rituals (see 6:6).

Doom of Nation (5:8–15)

5:8 *Blow ye the cornet.* Blowing the horns and crying aloud were alarm warnings. Sounding the alarm in these cities near Israel’s southern border with Benjamin and Judah indicates the extent of the judgment throughout the whole of the northern kingdom.

5:10 *remove the bound.* Removing the boundary lines was one of the covenant violations (Deut. 19:14; 27:17). Such practice was indicative of a pervasive spirit of deceit and selfishness. *I will pour out my wrath.* The image pictures God’s overflowing rage.

5:11 *commandment* is a rare term referring either to vulgar human commands or nonsense statements in mockery of prophetic revelation as in Isa. 28:10,13.

5:12 The *moth* is a symbol of destruction.

and to the house of Judah as rotteness.

13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.

14 For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him.

15 ¶ I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

CHAPTER 6

COME, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

2 After two days will he revive us: in the third day

5:13 *king Jareb.* The text is literally, “the king of Jareb.” Such a place or name is uncertain and most likely is used symbolically with vivid irony. It is related to a verb meaning to contend. The irony is that the nation sought relief from Assyria, the very place that would soon contend with them to their demise. The nation was guilty of ungodly and unlawful alliances, which reflected their ignorance of God’s law and their distrust of Him.

5:15 *I will go and return to my place.* The Lord declared that He would do the hard thing of withdrawing Himself from His people to awaken their senses to their spiritual need of Him. The threat of divine judgment was to be a motive to obedience and repentance. The potential of losing the experience of God’s presence should remain an incentive to maintaining personal holiness. *They will seek me early.* Seeking the Lord early refers to the diligence and earnestness of seeking, not the time of seeking.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 5

1. Verse 3 provides an opportunity to underscore the personal application of God’s knowledge. Israel’s sin was known to God and so is ours. It is impossible to escape His knowledge, and there is a sense in which every sin committed is in His presence. Ps. 139:7 and Heb. 4:13 reinforce this truth.
2. Comparing v. 6 with 15 provides an opportunity to discuss what it means to seek the Lord with a genuine heart of belief. Not all seeking is successful, yet God promises that those who seek Him with all their heart will find Him. The purpose of the divine discipline was to create that kind of heart.

Chapter 6: After inviting the nation to repent, the Lord contrasts His covenant expectations with their covenant treachery.

Statement of Hope and Invitation to Repent (6:1–3)

6:1 *let us return.* Return is the principal Old Testament word for repentance and means to turn by reversing directions, by doing an about-face. Repentance requires turning away from sin and turning to the Lord. It involves a change of life. *he will heal.* The invitation to repent rests on the confidence that the Lord’s chastening was remedial, designed to motivate repentance (5:15), and that He will graciously restore His people

he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

3 Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

4 ¶ O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

5 Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth.

6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

7 But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.

8 Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood.

when they genuinely repent. First John 1:9 states that every child of God has this same guarantee.

6:2 *After two days.* The time frame is not to be taken literally but rather idiomatically referring to a brief period. There will be no delay in enjoying the consequences of repentance.

6:3 *Then shall we know.* The Hebrew says literally, “Let us know; let us pursue to know the Lord.” It parallels the opening invitation in 6:1 and identifies another principal component of repentance, the knowledge of God, including the certainty of His mercy and grace to the penitent. Since ignorance of God was one of the nation’s chief sins (5:4), it follows that pursuing the knowledge of God would be essential to genuine repentance.

Sin of Unfaithfulness and Statement of Hope (6:4—11:11)

Refusal to Repent of Manifold Sins (6:4—8:14)

Transgression of the Covenant (6:4–11)

6:4 *your goodness.* Often translated as mercy or lovingkindness in the KJV, the Hebrew word translated here as goodness is a covenant term designating the loyalty of attitude and behavior required from and rightfully expected by the parties in a covenant with one another. It is a covenant obligation. Whereas God’s “loyalty” is consistent and everlasting (Ps. 136), Israel’s was inconsistent and fleeting. Ultimately, the believer’s loyalty to God is exercised in terms of trust and obedience.

6:6 The word *mercy* is the same as “goodness” in 6:4. *the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.* When religion takes shape without the knowledge of God, it will inevitably and invariably miss the mark of what is acceptable to God and profitable to the soul. Since God is never satisfied with purely external religion, it is imperative for Christians to cultivate and maintain genuine heart devotion before the Lord.

6:7 In Hebrew the word *men* is singular and could refer specifically to Adam and the first transgression of the covenant of works that condemned the whole race of humanity and set the pattern of all other transgressions. Humanity sinned in Adam and like Adam by overstepping or passing over the borders set by the covenant.

6:8 *Gilead* specifically refers to the Transjordan region of Israel but here most likely by synecdoche (part for the whole) designates the entirety of the nation. The word *polluted* comes from a root meaning “heel.” The imagery pictures foot tracks of blood.

6:9 *by consent* is literally “to Shechem.” Some interpreters

9 And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent: for they commit lewdness.

10 I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.

11 Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee, when I returned the captivity of my people.

CHAPTER 7

WHEN I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria: for they commit falsehood; and the thief cometh in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without.

2 And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face.

3 They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.

4 They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker, who ceaseth from raising after he hath kneaded the dough, until it be leavened.

5 In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorers.

6 For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire.

7 They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me.

8 Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned.

9 Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.

10 And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this.

11 ¶ Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.

12 When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.

13 Woe unto them! for they have fled from me:

identify Shechem as the place located between Samaria (the political city) and Bethel (the principal religious city). The reference would be to the priests' ambushing pilgrims on their way to worship. The translators of the KJV linked the word to the root for shoulder, suggesting that the priests committed their crimes "shoulder to shoulder" or by consent.

6:11 *he hath set an harvest.* Harvest is a common image of judgment.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 6

1. The opening invitation to repent and the assurance that God will accept genuine repentance give hope and encouragement to every Christian who thinks that he has lost out with God because of his sin. God's grace is greater than sin, and His mercy is infinite.
2. God's stated preference for mercy and knowledge of Himself over sacrifice and burnt offerings provides occasion to emphasize the importance of worshipping in spirit and in truth. We have a natural propensity to walk by sight and not by faith. It is possible to go through all the motions of worship without pleasing the Lord or without benefitting the soul. In this sense, think about the dangers of going to church. Remember that while the actions of worship are important, God is always looking at the heart. Today, many without Christ assume that going to church or keeping the Golden Rule will somehow accrue to their favor before God. Even believers sometimes allow their religious routines to substitute for private devotion and a sincere heart. Human reasoning contrasts with the divine preference for heart obedience over manual religion.

Chapter 7: By using various images, the Lord describes Israel's perverse impiety and spiritual insensitivity.

Obstinacy (7:1–16)

7:1 *Ephraim*, the principal tribe, and *Samaria*, the capital

city, stand for the whole nation.

7:2 *they consider not in their hearts that I remember.* The Hebrew says literally, "They do not say to their heart." In Hebrew "heart" includes the entirety of inner man—the mind, emotions, and will. Here the focus would be on mental activity; the idea is that they were not giving any thought to the fact that God remembers. In Hebrew, to remember is consciously and willfully to think about something. The contrast is stark. They refused to think about what God purposefully and intentionally thought about. The consequences were severe.

7:4 *an oven heated by the baker.* A hot, flaming oven that is not employed for its intended purpose describes the people's misdirected and perverted passions. The following verses play on this imagery of a fire out of control.

7:5 *scorers* are those who obstinately and contemptuously disdain correction or rebuke. The godly are to disassociate from their attitudes and behavior (Ps. 1:1) rather than joining with them or acting like them.

7:7 *there is none . . . that calleth.* Notwithstanding the evidences of trouble, their failure to call to the Lord in prayer betrayed a spirit of self-reliance. Prayer is always an index of the level of dependence upon the Lord.

7:8 *a cake not turned.* Scorched on one side, raw on the other, the cake would be uneatable. The image describes the failure of the nation to fulfill its purpose. The nation, instituted to be holy (Ex. 19:6), had so allied themselves with the heathen to be unholy.

7:9 *he knoweth it not.* A reminder that the effects of sin may be gradually imperceptible but ultimately obvious.

7:10 *the pride of Israel.* Ironically, all that the nation presumed to elevate and rely upon (their pride), being without foundation, witnessed against them. Notwithstanding the failure of their self-reliance, they refused to rely on the Lord.

7:11–12 *like a silly dove.* The nation's behavior is compared to the flight patterns of doves in the open sky, movement that appears to be unpredictable, lacking clear direction. But

destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.

14 And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, *and* they rebel against me.

15 Though I have bound *and* strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me.

16 They return, *but* not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this *shall be* their derision in the land of Egypt.

CHAPTER 8

SET the trumpet to thy mouth. *He shall come* as an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.

2 Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee.

3 Israel hath cast off *the thing that is good*: the enemy shall pursue him.

4 They have set up kings, but not by me: they

have made princes, and I knew *it not*: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off.

5 ¶ Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast *thee off*; mine anger is kindled against them: how long *will it be* ere they attain to innocency?

6 For from Israel *was* it also: the workman made it; therefore it *is* not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces.

7 For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.

8 Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein *is* no pleasure.

9 For they are gone up to Assyria, a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers.

10 Yea, though they have hired among the nations, now will I gather them, and they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes.

11 Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin.

12 I have written to him the great things of my law, *but* they were counted as a strange thing.

notwithstanding their erratic maneuvering that led them to find refuge in Egypt and Assyria, they could not escape the Lord. It is a sober reminder that all our actions and thoughts are open and thoroughly known to God and should therefore motivate holy behavior.

7:14 *they howled upon their beds*. The reference is most likely to the sensuous rituals of Baal worship designed to insure the harvest.

7:15 *To imagine mischief* is literally to plan or devise evil.

7:16 *a deceitful bow* is one whose string is slack and therefore one whose operation is defective.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 7

1. The principal theme running through the entire chapter concerns the spiritual insensitivity and callousness resulting from sin. The message offers an opportunity to reflect on how deceiving sin can be. The sinning nation was oblivious to God's presence (v. 2), His offers of mercy to them (v. 1), and His past goodness (v. 15). In their self-trust, they never thought to call upon the Lord (v. 7). Failure to pray is always a sign of self-dependence. You can see this whole chapter as an illustration of Jer. 17:5–6 that describes the cursed man in terms of self-trust and spiritual oblivion (the inability to see when the good comes, v. 6). It demonstrates the danger of following the deceitful and desperately wicked heart (Jer. 17:9).

Chapter 8: Israel's impending judgment is deserved because of their rebellion against God evident in their idolatry.

Idolatry (8:1–14)

8:1 *Set the trumpet to thy mouth*. The Hebrew says literally, "to your mouth a horn." The sounding of the horn was to signal an alarm. The absence of the verb tersely underscores the sense of urgency. The word translated *eagle* designates a large bird of prey and can refer to either a carrion vulture or an eagle. If a

vulture is in view, the image is that of the Lord's hovering over the temple as though it were a scene of death. If an eagle is in view, the image is of the Lord's swift and swooping attack against the temple because of sin. The KJV, probably because of the opening reference to sounding an alarm, translates it as eagle and sees a reference to impending judgment.

8:2 *Israel shall cry unto me*. A cry of protest and astonishment. Notwithstanding their covenant violations, they assumed that God would not so judge them since they included Him as part of their syncretistic worship. They were satisfied with their external rites; they supposed the Lord would be too.

8:4 *I knew it not*. Since God is omniscient, His not knowing something would be impossible. The Hebrew verb "to know" also has the sense of choosing or selecting. The statements regarding the kings and princes are parallel: just as the kings were not set up according to God's appointment, so the princes were set up without God's approval.

8:5 *Thy calf*. By metonymy, the calf represents the entire system of cultic rituals.

8:6 *but the calf . . . shall be broken in pieces*. The breaking of the calf is evidence of the idol's powerlessness, proof against any claim of deity and confirmation that the whole religious system which the calf symbolized was worthless. Compare the breaking of Dagon before the ark of the covenant in 1 Sam. 5.

8:8 *now shall they be among the Gentiles*. At the beginning of Israel's national existence the Lord declared them to be unique among the nations as His special treasure (Ex. 19:5), but now their sin has obliterated that distinction among the nations. God no longer takes pleasure in them.

8:9 *a wild ass alone*. An image of senseless stupidity.

8:10 The word *a little* is temporal, having the idea of a little while or soon. The gathering for judgment was imminent. *for the burden* is causal. Soon they would sorrow because of the heavy load imposed on them by the foreign king—a reference to the Assyrian captivity.

8:12 The word *law* is the most general word for special revelation, encompassing all of God's Word, not just legislation

13 They sacrifice flesh *for* the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat *it*; *but* the LORD accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt.

14 For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities: but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour the palaces thereof.

CHAPTER 9

REJOICE not, O Israel, for joy, as *other* people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor.

2 The floor and the winepress shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail in her.

3 They shall not dwell in the LORD's land; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean *things* in Assyria.

4 They shall not offer wine *offerings* to the LORD, neither shall they be pleasing unto him: their sacrifices *shall be* unto them as the bread of mourn-

ers; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the LORD.

5 What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the LORD?

6 For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them: the pleasant *places* for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns *shall be* in their tabernacles.

7 The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come; Israel shall know *it*: the prophet *is* a fool, the spiritual man *is* mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred.

8 The watchman of Ephraim *was* with my God: *but* the prophet *is* a snare of a fowler in all his ways, *and* hatred in the house of his God.

9 They have deeply corrupted *themselves*, as in the days of Gibeah: *therefore* he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins.

10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree

or commandments. When God gave His law, it was a means of aiding His people to love Him; it was a gracious thing for Him to do. How one responds to God's Word is an index to one's response to grace.

8:13 *now will he remember.* The Lord had not forgotten their sins but the time had come when He would purposefully think about their iniquity and act accordingly. To *visit* literally has the idea of inspecting or investigating and appropriately parallels to remember. God's examination exposes their sins and results in punishment. Together the verbs underscore the priority that God was giving to the matter. *Egypt* should be taken figuratively to refer to the place of bondage regardless of location. For this generation of Israel, Assyria would be that place.

8:14 *Israel hath forgotten.* To forget is a conscious and willful decision to refuse to think about. The Hebrew word translated *temples* can also designate palaces. Since reference is made to Judah's palaces (different word) at the end of the verse, Israel's palaces may be in view here. The *fenced cities* were designed for defense but were ineffective against the Lord's commissioned destruction.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 8

1. Verse 7 speaks of the sowing-reaping principle commonly used in Scripture (Hos. 10:12; Gal. 6:7–8). The law of the harvest rules. Sinful behavior has consequences to avoid, and righteous behavior has consequences to desire. We should strive, therefore, to do those things pleasing to the Lord, for He is the rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6).
2. Verse 8 reminds us of the wonderful gift of God's Word and how important it is that we properly respond to it. The great things of God's law define how God's children are supposed to live. The law and every other word that God has given are expressions of His love. Israel's disobedience to God's law was a rejection, therefore, of His love. We should be careful to receive God's Word as a gracious gift and respond to it in obedience as evidence of our love to Him.

Deserved Judgment (9:1—10:15)

Chapter 9: *Israel's judgment will include exile and decrease in population.*

Dispersion (9:1–5)

9:1 *Rejoice not.* The circumstance of the prohibited rejoicing most likely is the harvest, which the heathen and Israel mistakenly attributed to Baal. *thou hast gone a whoring.* Their spiritual adultery that separated them from God is described in the sensuous terms of the fertility rituals of the Baal cult. The word *reward* refers specifically to the wages paid to a harlot and points to the cult prostitution occurring at the threshing floors of grain as part of the pagan rites.

9:3 *They shall not dwell in the LORD's land.* The land was the Lord's, not Baal's, and exile from the land was the long-warned penalty for violating the covenant (Deut. 28:63). The reference to *Egypt* is metonymical, referring to a place of bondage regardless of location. In this context, the place of bondage was Assyria.

9:5 The exile will preclude them from worshipping the Lord according to the prescribed manner. The *solemn day* and the *day of the feast* are the same (literally, "in the day of the appointment, even in the day of the feast") and refer to the special occasions that the Lord set to celebrate various aspects of His goodness and provision (Lev. 23). The question is rhetorical, implying that there is nothing they can do.

Barrenness (9:6–17)

9:6 *Memphis* was one of the cities of Egypt frequently serving as the capital. Again the focus here is not on location but function. Assyria now was the oppressor of Israel—their Egypt.

9:7 The Hebrew word translated *visitation* basically means examination or inspection. Depending on what is observed in the examination, it can refer to either punishment or blessing. Here it refers to the time of punishment as defined in the following reference to the days of recompense or retribution. It was payback time for their transgressions.

9:9 The depth of depravity is compared to the atrocities committed in *Gibeah* by the Benjamites during the days of the judges involving the abuse, death, and subsequent

at her first time: *but* they went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto *that* shame; and *their* abominations were according as they loved.

11 *As for* Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird, from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception.

12 Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, *that there shall not be* a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!

13 Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus, *is* planted in a pleasant place: but Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer.

14 Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

15 All their wickedness *is* in Gilgal: for there I hated them: for the wickedness of their doings I will drive them out of mine house, I will love them no more: all their princes *are* revolvers.

16 Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit: yea, though they bring forth, yet will I slay *even* the beloved *fruit* of their womb.

17 My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations.

dismemberment of the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19).

9:10 *but they went to Baal-peor.* The imagery alludes to Israel's early history when, since God was blessing them, Balaam could not curse them, but they were soon seduced to shameful behavior at Peor (Num. 25:1–18). In their sin of choosing Baal, they became just as detestable as the god they chose to love.

9:11 By metonymy, *their glory* refers to the population of the nation that will be dispersed in judgment and decline in the future generations.

9:12 *there shall not be a man left.* Hyperbole, an intentional exaggeration, to underscore the severity of the Lord's chastisement.

9:13 *Ephraim, as I saw Tyrus.* Both Israel and Tyre were objects of Assyrian aggression. The reference to Tyrus, a pagan Phoenician city and a target of God's judgment (Isa. 23:8–18; Amos 1:9–10), suggests that Israel, by their sin, forfeited their privileges as the covenant nation and had become like any other nation. See a similar thought in Amos 9:7.

9:15 *Gilgal* was one of the cultic centers and refers not so much to the specific location but to all the religious perversions that occurred there and throughout the land. *I hated them . . . I will love them no more.* Hating and loving no more are parallel thoughts. Both hate and love are principally volitional terms referring to matters of choice. The statements here refer to God's rejection of the nation.

9:17 *My God will cast them away.* See Deut. 28:64. Hosea constantly employs covenant imagery in announcing the judgment. What Moses warned, Hosea applies.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 9

1. The description of the judgment in this chapter is summed up in v. 7 as the days of visitation: Israel was getting what they deserved. Nothing is more fearful than to get what we deserve from God. The word for visitation, having the basic idea of inspection or examination, often points to God's dealing with people in consequence or in accordance to what He sees about them.

CHAPTER 10

ISRAEL *is* an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. 2 Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.

3 For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us?

4 They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.

5 The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof *that* rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.

6 It shall be also carried unto Assyria *for* a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.

7 *As for* Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water.

That man is so small and God is so infinitely great makes His visitation with man an amazing reality (Ps. 8:3–4). Yet, it is also an awful reality and should therefore be a motive to purity knowing that God will punish iniquity (see Amos 3:2 where the word "punish" is the word "visit"). Ps. 17:3 expresses the proper response to the fact that God examines all of life: "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." God's involvement in the affairs of man is never neutral.

Chapter 10: Israel's sin leads to total destruction.

Destruction (10:1–15)

10:1 *Israel is an empty vine.* That the empty vine brought forth a multitude of fruit means that it was not barren. The image is of a vine overflowing with fruit to be harvested. The tragedy is that Israel employed the fruit for selfish purposes and attributed the affluence to Baal, hence the multiplication of altars and manufacture of images.

10:2 *Their heart is divided.* The Hebrew root could also be translated as "slippery." Whether divided or smooth, it is a heart that is deceptively unstable and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9; James 1:8). *he shall break down their altars.* Literally, he shall break the neck of their altars, a vivid picture of the decisive finality of the destruction.

10:4 *judgment* does not refer to an act of punishment but rather to the exercise of justice. The evidence of their deceit was that justice was like a weed growing where good grain was expected. There was no justice at all.

10:5 *Beth-aven* (the house of idolatry) was Hosea's sarcastic designation of Bethel (house of God), one of Israel's cultic centers. His reference to *the calves* may be another prophetic sarcasm. There was most likely only a single calf at Bethel, but Hebrew often uses the plural to magnify an object, called the plural of excellence or majesty. So, ironically, what they regarded as their supreme object of worship had no power to protect itself from being part of Assyria's spoil (10:6).

10:6 *king Jareb* See notes at 5:13 for explanation of Jareb.

8 The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.

9 O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.

10 *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.

11 And Ephraim *is as* an heifer *that is* taught, *and* loveth to tread out *the corn*; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, *and* Jacob shall break his clods.

12 Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for *it is* time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

13 Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.

14 Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon *her* children.

15 So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off.

CHAPTER 11

WHEN Israel *was* a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

3 I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.

4 I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

5 ¶ He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.

6 And the sword shall abide on his cities, and

10:8 *The high places also of Aven.* Literally, the high places of idolatry—a reference to the whole of Israel's cultic rituals.

10:9 *Gibeah* was proverbial for moral depravity. See explanation at 9:9 for the historical context.

10:10 *in their two furrows.* Literally, "to two of their eyes." The idea is that the atrocities of the judgment would be in plain view.

10:11 *Ephraim is as an heifer.* The contrast is between the unbridled and yoked beast. By analogy, the freedom of the nation was going to transition to the yoke and burden of foreign bondage.

10:12 *it is time to seek the LORD.* Notwithstanding the certain judgment, Hosea admonishes the nation to fulfill their covenant demands in order to experience covenant benefits.

10:13 The sowing-reaping imagery is clear (Gal. 6:7). It is always tragic when God gives what is deserved.

10:14 *Shalman.* Perhaps a reference to the Assyrian king Shalmeneser, infamous for his battle atrocities.

10:15 *Bethel*, representing the cause of judgment (the religious syncretism), is viewed as the agent of judgment. *in a morning* refers not so much to the time of day but to the sudden swiftness in which the kingdom will fall.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 10

1. The invitation to repent and seek the Lord (v. 12) stands in stark contrast to what appears to be a helpless and hopeless situation of sin and punishment. The invitation itself testifies to God's grace being greater than man's sin. Yet it is a sober reminder that men must come to God on His terms and at His time. It was time to seek the Lord, but Isaiah indicates that the seeking must occur "while he may be found" (Isa. 55:6). The force of that verb is "while He permits Himself to be found." The implication is that He is not always findable (Prov. 1:28). There is always urgency in heeding the Word of God.
2. The contrast between vv. 12 and 13 illustrates the sowing-reaping principle both positively and negatively. Righteousness reaps mercy, but wickedness reaps

iniquity (a word that can refer to punishment as well as sin). This law of the harvest ought to be one of the motives for us to live in purity and holiness.

Chapter 11: In spite of God's tender love and compassion for Israel, they continue to spurn Him.

Statement of Hope Springing from God's Love (11:1–11)

11:1 *out of Egypt.* The exodus marked the beginning of Israel's national identity and throughout the Old Testament was evidence of God's covenant and electing love. The exodus was a paradigm of God's gracious salvation. Matt. 2:15 forthrightly declares the Christological import of Hosea's statement by applying Israel's exodus to Jesus' deliverance from Herod's plot. By analogy, just as God delivered Israel from bondage to insure the progression of redemptive history leading to Christ, so God delivered Christ from Herod, thus preserving His Son to accomplish His redemptive purpose.

11:2 *As they called them, so they went from them.* Israel's response to God's call was contrary to expectation. Rather than heeding the call, they went into idolatry. The plural subject of the calling most likely refers to the frequent call of the prophets, sent by God to reiterate the Exodus message. That prophetic witness was repeatedly rejected (Jer. 7:25–26).

11:3 *I taught Ephraim also to go.* The root for the verb "to teach to go" means "feet" and thus refers specifically to teaching to walk. It is a tender image of a parent holding up the arms of a toddler, supporting his first steps.

11:4 *I laid meat unto them.* Literally, "I bent down to him, I fed"—another image of a parent's tender care of spoon-feeding the child.

11:5 The link between *Egypt* and *Assyria* is now explicit. What Egypt had been, Assyria was about to become—the place of bondage.

11:6 *branches* translates a word that refers to something extending, such as a limb. Here it most likely refers to that which extends from a gate to keep it locked, its bar or bolt. The point is that the city under attack cannot be secured.

shall consume his branches, and devour *them*, because of their own counsels.

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt *him*.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? *how* shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? *how* shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I *am* God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

11 They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will

place them in their houses, saith the LORD.

12 Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.

CHAPTER 12

EPHRAIM feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

3 ¶ He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God:

4 Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him *in* Beth-el, and there he spake with us;

11:7 The word translated *backsliding* is a principal word for apostasy. *though they called*. The plural subject of call again refers to the ministry of the prophets whose message was spurned.

11:8 *Admah* and *Zeboim* were allies of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14:8) who suffered the same annihilation (Deut. 29:23). The destruction of these cities was proverbial of total and irreversible destruction. Although judgment was coming to Israel, it would not match the annihilation of these ancient cities. *mine heart . . . my repentings*. These are bold anthropopathisms, human emotions attributed to God to emphasize the intensity of His compassion.

11:9 *I will not return to destroy*. This is an idiom meaning that God will not destroy again. His chastisement of the nation is reasoned and controlled—not a temper out of control like what is common among men. *I will not enter into the city*. Entering the city has military connotations. The Lord's refusal to enter is another evidence of His restraint in judgment.

11:10–11 Together these verses depict the time of restoration when the Lord irresistibly reassembles the dispersed in their own land. This is the prospect of hope.

Sin of Faithlessness and Statement of Hope (11:12—14:9)

Sin Described (11:12—13:16)

11:12 The contrast between Israel and Judah is pronounced. Judah had not yet degenerated to the depth and blatancy of Israel's sin. *compasseth me about*. The deceit and treachery that surrounded the Lord graphically describes the extent of the sin; it was everywhere. *Judah yet ruleth with God*. In contrast, Judah's ruling with God has the idea of fellowship, a walking with the Lord. The word translated *saints* literally is "holy ones." It could well refer to God's people, but it may be a plural of majesty referring to God Himself. This would parallel the specific reference to God. See Proverbs 9:10, for instance, for an example of this sense for "holy ones."

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 11

1. Remembering our redemption is a good motive for proper living. The opening reference to the exodus is a reminder of God's grace, power, and provision of effective atonement in saving His people. The more we reflect on God's grace in saving us through faith in Christ's finished and effective atoning work, the more we should

be moved to live in gratitude the new life we have in Christ. When Israel spurned God's love, it was contrary to what would be expected in view of what He had done for them.

Chapter 12: Notwithstanding the Lord's consistent prophetic witness to the nation, they are oblivious to His Word and persist in their sins.

12:1 *Ephraim feedeth on wind*. Feeding or grazing on the wind and pursuing the east wind are vivid images of futility used to describe the foolish foreign alliances Israel assumed would be to their advantage. *they do make a covenant with the Assyrians*. Second Kings 17:1–6 may record the actual historical event to which Hosea refers.

12:2 *controversy* is a legal term. The Lord is bringing an indictment against Judah. Although the southern kingdom had not yet matched Israel's sin, they were not exempt from divine justice. God would deal justly with Jacob *according to his ways* (his overall character and way of life) and *his doings* (his specific acts of behavior). The prospect of getting what we deserve from God is fearful.

12:3 *He took his brother by the heel*. Israel's character and behavior are traced to their covenant ancestor and events of his birth and life (Gen. 25–35). In fact, Jacob's name is derived from the word "heel," a key factor in the birth narrative. It has the idea of supplanting or overtaking and suggests Jacob's propensity to control and manipulate his own circumstances. In the life of the patriarch, his bent to control and dominate led to both bad and beneficial consequences. It is most likely this domineering character trait that is the point of similarity between the patriarch and the nation.

12:4 *power over the angel*. The angel with whom Jacob wrestled was the angel of the Lord, a Christophany or preincarnate appearance of Christ. Hosea's reference to Jacob's weeping is not found in the Genesis account (Gen. 32:24–28) but adds significant insight into the means by which Jacob prevailed. His prevailing with God involved his humble submission to Him. The reference to Jacob's finding the Lord in *Bethel* (house of God) is a pointed irony in view of Hosea's frequent reference to Bethel's becoming Beth-aven (house of idolatry). National Jacob lost out with God in the very place the patriarch Jacob had found Him.

5 Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial.
 6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.
 7 ¶ *He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.*
 8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: *in* all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that *were* sin.
 9 And I *that am* the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.
 10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.
 11 *Is there iniquity in Gilead?* surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars *are* as heaps in the furrows of the fields.
 12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept *sheep*.
 13 And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.
 14 Ephraim provoked *him* to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.

CHAPTER 13

WHEN Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.
 2 And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, *and* idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.
 3 Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff *that* is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.
 4 Yet I *am* the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for *there is* no saviour beside me.
 5 ¶ I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.
 6 According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.
 7 Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe *them*:
 8 I will meet them as a bear *that is* bereaved of *her whelps*, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.

12:5 The title *God of hosts* has a military connotation. The Lord is the God of armies, the Commander-in-Chief. Jacob, the controller, learned that Jehovah was the ultimate controller and commander of all.

12:6 *turn . . . keep mercy . . . wait.* The prophet implores the nation to learn what their ancestor learned and pursue God's favor by repenting, maintaining covenant obligations, and persistently looking to Him in faith.

12:7 That the Hebrew word translated *merchant* is the pejorative word "Canaan" adds to the opprobrium of the indictment.

12:8 *they shall find none iniquity in me.* Notwithstanding all the evidence of the nation's transgression, they regarded themselves as innocent. It is a spiritual law that the further a person is from God the less sensitive to sin he will be. The converse is true as well: the closer to God a person is, the more sensitive to sin he will be.

12:9 *I . . . am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt.* A reminder that God has remained consistently the same from the beginning of His relationship with the nation when He delivered them from Egypt and provided for them in their wilderness wanderings.

12:10 *spoken by the prophets.* See Jer. 7:23–26. As God consistently speaks, He testifies to His grace and to the nation's hardness.

12:11 In 6:8, the prophet singled out *Gilead* as a place associated with violent social crimes, and here it is clear that *Gilgal* was a religious site. Together the cities represent the entire nation, guilty of both social and religious sins. The two spheres of sin connect the two divisions of the law of God, evincing the inviolable principle that transgression against true worship always couples with transgressions against society.

12:12 *Jacob fled.* Hosea abruptly alludes to the patriarchal narrative of Jacob's escape from Esau and his service to Laban (Gen. 29). His exile to Syria was the consequence of his deceitful actions. In Laban, he found his manipulative match.

Hosea's point is that just as Jacob's sin caused these circumstances, so the nation's sin caused the reproach the Lord would bring upon them (12:14).

12:13 *by a prophet.* A reference to Moses, the most significant of the Old Testament prophets foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah, the ideal Prophet (Deut. 18:15,18).

12:14 In Hebrew *blood* is plural, a figure used to designate guilt.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 12

1. Just as Paul directs attention to Old Testament history to teach spiritual lessons, so does Hosea in speaking to his generation about the history of the patriarch Jacob. Central to the lesson is Jacob's wrestling with the angel, which is a vivid illustration of earnest and prevailing prayer. Too often our prayers are casual and unthinking. This reminds us of the energy and diligence that ought to mark our praying. Notwithstanding the struggle and how injurious it was to his flesh, Jacob would not let go until he received the blessing (Gen. 32:24–28). So we must keep on asking until we receive the answer. This is a reminder that prayer is an arduous exercise of faith.

Chapter 13: Israel's persistent sin in spite of God's past redemption from Egypt and His promised redemption from death results in devastating judgment.

13:1 Hosea contrasts Ephraim's rise to prominence among the tribes of Israel with their demise because of their guilt in worshipping Baal.

13:2 *kiss the calves.* The imagery of kissing the calves suggests submission and homage. The gesture required to be directed to the messianic Son to escape His anger (Ps. 2:12), they offered to idols.

13:8 The Hebrew word translated *caul* literally means "enclosure" and refers to the chest cavity.

9 ¶ O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me *is* thine help.

10 I will be thy king; where *is any other* that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?

11 I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath.

12 The iniquity of Ephraim *is* bound up; his sin *is* hid.

13 The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he *is* an unwise son; for he should not stay long in *the place of* the breaking forth of children.

14 I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.

15 ¶ Though he be fruitful among *his* brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his

spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels.

16 Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up.

CHAPTER 14

O ISRAEL, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

2 Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive *us* graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.

3 Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, *Ye are* our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

4 ¶ I will heal their backsliding, I will love them

13:11 *I gave thee a king.* Given the historical situation, the singular king most likely is a collective noun, referring not to a specific king but to a whole series of kings. During the closing years of Israel's kingdom, there was great political instability evidenced by the rise and fall of several kings. This absence of good and stable leadership was itself indication of God's displeasure.

13:12 *bound up . . . hid.* The image is of Ephraim's sin being packaged and stored, implying that it was being held in reserve for its time of reckoning.

13:13 The image suggests that when the time for birth arrives, the *unwise son* does not come to the mouth of the womb, to the birth canal. He refuses to be born, to come to the new beginning.

13:14 *I will ransom them from the power of the grave.* In stark contrast to man's refusal and inability to be born, God declares His purpose to deliver from death, both spiritual and physical. Hope for life resides in God alone. The New Testament quotes this text in regard to the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:55), applying it directly to God's purpose and power to deliver from physical death. *Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.* The idea is that God will not relent or change His mind regarding the promised redemption from and destruction of death. The promise of the gospel is sure and cannot be frustrated.

13:15–16 These verses abruptly shift from the declaration of hope in v. 14 to the pronouncement of horrific judgment on the nation. God's ultimate purpose in delivering His people is certain, but that unchanging purpose does not excuse or exempt the current generation of Israel from the consequences of rebellion against the Lord.

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 13

1. The chapter begins with a warning of the dangers of idolatry. Israel exchanged true spiritual worship for sight worship. That God regards idolatry of any sort as an abomination and a personal insult is obvious from the most cursory reading of the Bible (Rom. 1:18,23,25). Idolatry facilitates worship since it is always easier to operate by sight instead of faith, but it is dark and serious sin. Idolatry goes beyond just images, statues, or paintings. Since the heart, as Calvin said, "is a perpetual

factory of idols," it is easy to turn legitimate practices of worship into perversions. We must be careful to worship in spirit and in truth.

2. Verse 14 underscores the absolute certainty of the gospel. The promised resurrection, the necessary consequence of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12–22), is based on the immutability of God. Changing His mind regarding His redemptive purpose for His people is impossible. This parallels Malachi's statement linking God's unchangeableness to Jacob's not being consumed (Mal. 3:6). This should generate praise and thanksgiving for our salvation, knowing that even though we may be unfaithful, He never is. He always keeps His word.

Chapter 14: The call to repent includes instructions for repentance and a description of the blessings and benefits of restored relationship with the Lord.

Repentance and Hope (14:1–9)

14:2 *Take with you words.* "Taking words" refers to the prayer of confession that should accompany true repentance. See David's prayer of confession in Ps. 51 for an example. The word translated *iniquity* has three senses in the Old Testament: the actual sin, consequent guilt, and punishment for sin. In this context, it designates guilt. *receive us graciously.* Literally, "accept [the] good." The petition involves offering to God of what He requires with the expectancy that He will receive what is offered. A commitment of self in obedience is the essence of what God demands (Mic. 6:8). *so will we render the calves of our lips.* Literally, "we resolve to repay young bulls, our lips." The imagery points to the votive or peace offerings, which were offered to the Lord in payment of a vow or in thanksgiving for grace and salvation (Ps. 116:16–18; Heb. 13:15). A believer at peace with God will be full of praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude for grace.

14:3 This verse expresses the forsaking of every empty hope in exchange for dependence upon the Lord. The orphan is a vivid example of one who is destitute and incapable of self-preservation, one who is completely dependent on another. Thus, repentance involves abandonment to the mercies of God.

14:4 *I will heal . . . I will love them freely.* Accompanying the invitation to repent is the assurance that God will forgive those

freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.
 5 I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.
 6 His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.
 7 They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive *as* the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof *shall be* as the wine of Lebanon.

8 Ephraim *shall say*, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard *him*, and observed him: I *am* like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.

9 Who *is* wise, and he shall understand these *things*? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD *are* right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

who genuinely confess their sins. Hosea's assurance parallels John's guarantee in 1 John 1:9. When God loves freely, it means that He loves on His own accord. Had God not loved Israel of His own accord, He would never have had reason to love them. Amazing as was His love to Israel, it was not unique, for His love for us is graciously free as well.

14:5–8 In a series of similes (comparisons), these verses detail the benefits resulting from God's dew-like provision, which is evidence of His favor (Prov. 19:12): growth like a lily, stability like a deep-rooted cedar, attractiveness in appearance and aroma like the cedar and olive trees, and fruitfulness. To put all this in New Testament terms, God gives His people richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17) as He lavishes on them all the riches of His grace found and enjoyed in Christ (Eph. 1:3–14).

14:9 *The just shall walk . . . transgressors shall fall.* The book concludes according to the covenant pattern of two opposing options typically found in Deuteronomy. The walking of the just and the staggering of the transgressor parallels the choice between life and death, blessing and cursing (Deut. 30:15,19).

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Chapter 14

1. The opening verses are most instructive in charting the marks of genuine repentance. There must be confession of sin, commitment to God, praise for grace, forsaking of everything else in exclusive dependence on God. The Lord's invitation to repent is not ineffective, for God seeks the sinner with grace before the sinner seeks Him. Therefore, with the invitation comes the assurance of God's free love. There is something wonderfully consistent about God's promise to forgive those who genuinely confess their sins.
 2. For any Christian troubled and disappointed with the level of his spiritual experience and enjoyment, the closing words of Hosea are encouraging and instructive. There is a remedy to spiritual dryness, a way to reverse a path littered with disobedience and sin. For those far from God, there is a way back to Him; for those near God, there is a way to be nearer still.
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