

## Hosea'S Prophecy (Part Five)

Hosea 10-12:1

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With the result of the election this week, it seems that we have moved into an accelerated time of God's plan, which makes the prophecy of Hosea all the more important to us. This Sabbath, we will continue our summary analysis of the book of Hosea, chapters 10-12.

When the prophet Hosea came on the scene, Israel was enjoying the greatest peace and prosperity since the time of their division into the two separate nations of Israel and Judah. They were affluent and living in luxury. However, it was especially during this time that there was the great decline of Israel's morality and wealth. So we can immediately see an association with our nation today.

The kings of Israel were a wicked lot who followed the sins of Israel's first king, Jeroboam I, and they refused to repent and turn to God. Murder, idolatry, and immorality were rampant in the land, and nobody seemed to be interested in hearing the Word of God.

As we have gone through Hosea, we have seen God's indictment of Israel and His warning of her coming punishment. But Israel and Judah refused to submit and seek God. Israel was worse than Judah, but all have sinned.

In my last sermon on Hosea's prophecy, we analyzed chapter 8, which dealt with Israel's apostasy and hypocrisy, and chapter 9, which dealt with God's judgment of her sin. The more prosperous the Israelites became, the more they turned from God, and now they and their children must suffer a bitter harvest of their sins. The nation is blighted, having no roots and bearing no fruit. She was a spreading vine, but now she is without physical and spiritual fruit. Again, the parallels to our nation today are almost uncanny.

The people of Israel may claim to know and love the Lord God, but their deeds proved otherwise. Because of their sins, and that they forgot God, they will reap the whirlwind. The whirlwind represents the fact that they will reap, not merely as they have sown, but with an awful increase. They sowed foolishness and pride, and will reap not merely emptiness and disappointment, but sudden, overwhelming destruction. Those who sow the seed of unrighteousness will reap a harvest of judgment.

We saw God's standard for judgment, and that a major problem for Israel is that they see God as the one who is *not* there. Because of this sinful attitude, God pronounces the sentence. Basically, Israel's problem was that she had a divided heart. She was, at best, lukewarm, and a term we all understand—Israel was Laodicean about God and His way of life. But she was enthusiastic about the ways of this world. She was enticed by them and followed after them like a panting dog or a pleasure-seeking prostitute. Remember Hosea's wife Gomer.

Over and over again, in the Old Testament, Israel is portrayed as God's choice vine or vineyard. However, in Isaiah 5, the prophet wrote that Israel was a disappointing vine that produced wild grapes.

**Isaiah 5:1-2, 7** Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

Speaking of Israel, Jeremiah expresses it this way:

**Jeremiah 2:21** Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality [speaking of Israel]. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?

Ezekiel 15 compares Israel to a vine also, as does Ezekiel 19:10: "Your mother was like a vine . . . fruitful and full of branches."

One of the best-known passages is from the Psalms:

**Psalms 80:8-10** You have brought a vine out of Egypt; you have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs.

The extraordinary thing about the use of this imagery in the Old Testament is that it is always brought forth as a symbol of Israel's degeneration, rather than of her fruitfulness. The point of Isaiah's reference is that the vine has run wild, producing sour grapes, which is a characteristic of Israel from the time she went awry, from the time when God made her as a new nation, all the way up until today.

**Isaiah 5:4** What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? [God says] Why they, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

God is omniscient, He is all-knowing, and He knew the answer to this. It is a rhetorical question. It is a question presented for Israel to think about, and God knew the answer, but Israel did not seem to get it—year after year, millennia after millennia.

It is the same in Hosea: in chapter 10, Israel is termed a “spreading or luxuriant vine.” But Israel's fruit is not what God wants, because the people's fruit is one of idolatrous religion. It is a fruit for Israel's own self-indulgence (that is a key word).

**Hosea 10:1-2** Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself. [There is the self-indulgence.] According the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars [you might say the religions or the things that became idols]; according to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars. Their heart is divided [another key here]; now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; he will ruin their sacred pillars.

In each chapter of his book, Hosea has been analyzing the people's sin in a slightly different way. He does the same thing here on the basis of Israel's divided and deceitful heart; that is his approach in this chapter. Verse 2 begins with the words “Their heart is divided.” The Hebrew word *chalaq*, which is translated *divided* in the New King James Version, is translated *deceitful* in the NIV and *false* in the English Standard Version. It literally means *smooth*, so how do we get smooth out of the interpretation that has been given?

Applied to a person's speech, we would translate *chalaq* as the modern terms *oily*, *slick*, *double-tongued*. The idea is that the people went through the motions of doing one thing, while actually they were intent on doing something else. Do we have that today? Of course we do, in this society. Consequently, we must see the examples that Hosea gives in terms of our own hypocrisy as a nation.

The first area in which Israel may be said to have had a divided or deceitful heart is her purported love for God, contrasted with her true unfaithfulness. This is the liability of the first two verses, where the issue is Israel's idolatrous worship. The whole background to the book, Hosea's marriage, comes into view here, because in Hosea, love or faithfulness, and hate or unfaithfulness, is illustrated by faithfulness or unfaithfulness in marriage. No doubt, when Hosea's wife Gomer went off with her lovers, she would have said that she was not being entirely unfaithful to Hosea (which is what people in mainstream Christianity do today, as they keep Halloween and the other pagan festivals).

She may have said that she still did love him, but perverse love like that has no place in marriage. By its very nature, by the law of God, marriage is an exclusive covenant. It is one man and one woman faithful to each other. There is no other combination that works. When a third party is infused into the relationship, what happens is the love between husband and wife is betrayed, and the vacillating partner is being unfaithful because of, at the very least, wrong desire.

That is what Israel was doing: she was coming to the altars of God and was pretending to worship Him. She claimed that Yahweh was her God, but even while she was saying this, Israel was multiplying false altars and dedicating sacred stones. But God had not commanded them; He did not want those stones, and Israel was really committing spiritual adultery with various idols.

The second area of Israel's deceit concerns her profession of truth versus actual falsehood. The people made a lot of false promises and agreements that they had no intention of keeping.

**Hosea 10:3-4** For now they say, "We have no king, because we did not fear the Lord. And as for a king, what would he do for us?" [They had an incompetent king who did not lead in the best interests of the nation; again, we see a parallel here.] They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant. Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field.

There is an interesting agricultural image here in the last sentence of verse 4. The NIV words it this way: "Therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field." People could not trust one another, and few were keeping their promises. Therefore, they had to sue one another to get what they owed or what they coveted. The multiplying of laws and lawsuits is one evidence that integrity and credibility is vanishing

from society, another parallel to our nation today (to the whole world, in fact).

Hosea's point is that the people pretended to speak truthfully, and they made agreements that supposedly could be trusted as appropriate for those who are followers of the God of truth. But actually, they were attempting to cheat others for the sake of their own personal gain. To operate by any other standard than truth, while saying that one is a follower of the God of truth, is absolute, sheer hypocrisy.

No doubt Israel would have claimed that this is just the way business was conducted in their time, and many would say the same today. But what is this, but another case of Israel taking its standards from the world, rather than the clear principles and standards of the Word of God? The farther we get away from the Word of God, the worse things get.

The true glory of Israel was God, and the glory of God is in Himself. When God then, for the sin of His people, gave them into the hand of their enemies, He vindicated His own glory, first by avenging any assault offered to His worship.

**Hosea 10:5-7** The inhabitants of Samaria [the capital of the Northern Kingdom] fear because of the calf of Beth Aven. For its people mourn for it, and its priests shriek for it—because its glory has departed from it. The idol also shall be carried to Assyria as a present for King Jareb. Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel [his own decisions]. As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water.

Totally ineffective in helping the populace and the people. For 200 years, Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During all of that time, it was the seat of idolatry. There, Ahab built a temple to Baal. Jehu broke down the temple of Baal, but it does not appear to have otherwise changed the city to rid it of idolatry; he just made a stab at it. He was unfaithful, but he said he was only "slightly" unfaithful.

During Hosea's time, the Israelites had set up the idols in the place of God, so God stops calling them "His people," but calls them "the people of the calf." They had chosen it for their god. Similarly, Moab was called "the people of Chemosh," after their idol. So it was very common for the people to be titled after their idols: the people of whatever god they idolized or worshipped.

The Israelites had rejoiced in the calf, rather than God, and now the people and their priests were mourning over it, since the calf is incapable of helping itself, much less

them. The true glory of Israel was God, and the glory of the calves for which Ephraim had exchanged their God was something that easily flourished from their affluence; they were a very wealthy people. The gold of which their idols were made, and the rich offerings made to them, funded the promotion of their idolatry. People throw their money at whatever they support and desire, and we see the same thing today.

The Israelites mourned, not because they had offended God by their sin, but for the loss of that dumb idol they treasured. Their idol had been their sin, and had brought heavy miseries upon them, and they were impenitent, even under God's discipline. Hosea does not mention any grief for the ransacking of their country, or the burning of their cities, or the slaughter of their people and their shame. He only names one thing as moving them, as being emotional for them: their idols. That is how important they were to them.

There are many forms of idolatry. Notice some of the definitions Bible dictionaries provide. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines idolatry as "the worship of something created, as opposed to the worship of the creator Himself." The *New Ungers Bible Dictionary* defines it very thoroughly as:

In a general sense, idolatry is the paying of divine honor to any created thing; the ascription of divine power to natural agencies [witchcraft and other tings]. Idolatry may be classified as follows:

1. The worship of inanimate objects, such as stones, trees, rivers, etc.
2. Of animals.
3. Of the higher powers of nature, such as the sun, moon, stars and the forces of nature, as air, fire, wind, etc.
4. Hero worship, or of deceased ancestors.
5. Idealism, or the worship of abstractions or mental qualities such as justice. [Social justice comes to mind, which is another term for communism and progressivism.]

Another classification is suggestive:

1. The worship of Jehovah under image or symbol.
2. The worship of other gods under image or symbol.

### 3. The worship of the image or symbol itself.

Each of these forms of idolatry had its peculiar immoral tendency, which meant every one of these forms of idolatry was accompanied by immorality.

The Israelites' primary anxiety was not that God had departed from them, but that their calf, or their idol in which they had set their glory, was gone. They had frantically relied on their idols and had lavished their affluence upon them. Without God, people mourn, not their sins, but their idols. We see that in the description of Revelation, with what happens when Babylon falls. What are they mourning over? The economy, things, slaves, and so forth.

The authors of the book *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* define affluenza as: "A painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from a dogged pursuit of more." According to the United Nations environment program, Americans spend more for trash bags than 90 of the world's 210 countries spend for everything. Shopping has become the most preferred activity of Americans, with 70% of us visiting shopping malls each week. Americans now typically spend six hours a week shopping, and only 40 minutes playing with our children. One poll found that 93% of teenage American girls rate shopping as their favorite activity (no surprise, from what we see in the media).

More than 1.5 million people file for bankruptcy each year, a figure greater than the number of people who graduate from college annually. What a sick country!

The most corrosive impact of consumerism has been on human relationships. It flourishes by promoting a use-and-throw culture; a culture of planned obsolescence. The authors of *Affluenza* rightly posit that "Attitudes formed in relation to products eventually get transferred to people as well." Just as things are discarded after use, people too are cast off if they lose the capacity to participate in the cycle of consumption.

In a consumerist culture, one's master status is linked exclusively to one's ability to buy. When God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments, the final commandment was "Do not covet."

**Exodus 20:17** You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.

We are very familiar with that, but this world is not. They are trying to rid that commandment from showing up anywhere in public.

Increasing consumption is slowly sucking the essence out of humanity. Craving instant gratification, we feel entitled to have everything now. Credit is extended to make sure you can have what you want now, and pay for it later, and we are willing to spend the rest of our lives paying off that which we purchase today. Our nation with its quantitative easing is stealing all the way down to our great-grandchildren. What hate of our children there is in this nation!

The third area of Israel's duplicity was her profession of righteousness while actually practicing evil. In going to her high altars, she undoubtedly pretended to be the very epitome of goodness and righteousness. The environmental movement comes to mind, and so does social justice, as the high-and-mighty, smug, self-righteous attitude of many in this nation.

God was not fooled by this hypocrisy. He saw the evil that was done in secret, and sometimes, not even in secret. He calls the altars "high places of wickedness that will soon be destroyed."

**Hosea 10:8** Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars; they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us!" And to the hills, "Fall on us!"

Notice that God is not talking here about what we would call mere shortcomings or failures. He is talking about real wickedness, the category in which He places the Israelite's sins or transgressions. The idolatrous shrines will become nothing but clumps of weeds, and the people will beg God to destroy them quickly. The altars, high places, and idolatrous shrines include such things today as the headquarters and peripheral offices of religious, economic, social, and educational centers that promote idolatry.

We must give attention to a reference that we have overlooked up to this point in covering Hosea. It is the reference to Gibeah, referred to twice previously in Hosea 5:8 and Hosea 9:9. Now here at greater length, it is a serious reference as God says:

**Hosea 10:9** "O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah; there they stood. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them."



Gibeah was a town occupied by the tribe of Benjamin, and it comes into history through a terrible exploit that was performed there. During the days of the judges, a priest or Levite, who was on a trip, was on his way home with his concubine. He found, as night neared, that he was not going to be able to reach home that evening. He did reach Gibeah, so he went in and looked for a place to stay for the night. None would open their home to him. After a long time, an old man came in from the fields and invited the Levite and his concubine to stay with him.

Soon, a band of the depraved youth of the town gathered outside the old man's door, and demanded that he send the Levite out. They demanded to have homosexual relations with him, precisely the sin and circumstances that had occurred much earlier when angelic visitors had entered Sodom to get Lot and his family to leave the city.

The old man resisted, and in the end, the concubine was sent out to face the young men. They used her all that night, and in the morning she staggered back to the house where she fell on the doorstep. When the Levite emerged the next morning, she was dead. This man took his concubine home and cut her body into 12 pieces. He then sent the parts to each of the tribes of Israel. He intended to shock the tribes, and he certainly succeeded.

They rallied, and eventually attacked the people of Benjamin, and almost wiped them out. It was a very black day in Israel's history. The people were greatly distressed at what had happened, and equally dismayed at the near loss of one of the tribes of Israel. As we read chapters 19 through 21 of Judges, where the story is told, we discover that God was also greatly repulsed, and not just because of the atrocity performed by the Benjamites. He was disgusted because the moral tone of all of the people in the whole nation was perverted. Not everyone had participated in the Benjamites' sin, but all were so insensitive to sin that it took an act such as the Levite's to awaken them.

**Judges 21:25** In those days there was no king [no righteous leader] in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

In a weakened sense of that, every leader in this nation now (I should say most of them), are ignoring our Constitution and any righteous laws that are connected to it. We, for all practical purposes, have no righteous leader in Israel today. Without a leader for direction, you only go one way.

God goes back to this horrible period to portray vividly how he regards Israel's sin, in the

time of Hosea. The NIV says:

**Hosea 10:9** “Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, Israel, and there you have remained.”

What it is saying is, do not think of what happened in Gibeah as an exception to your normal moral conduct: that is the level on which you have been operating constantly.

At the time of God's choosing, He would discipline Israel by gathering the nations against her.

**Hosea 10:10-11** “When it is My desire, I will chasten them. Peoples shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions. Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain; but I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow. Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods.”

In the last phrase of verse 10, the two sins were the revolt from the Lord their God and their worship of idols. Because of their two great sins, they would be bound in captivity and exile as a punishment. In other words, they would be harnessed to their double sin. The imagery in verse 11 is that of plowing. Israel is pictured as yoked to her sin like a heifer. Isaiah 5:18 expresses a similar binding:

**Isaiah 5:18** Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope. [Meaning they drag it along with them wherever they go; it is a constant thing.]

The people of Israel had rejected God, and they would be rejected by Him. As a result, they will be wanderers among the nations. Remember, Hosea often uses the name Ephraim to stand for the northern kings of Israel, and he uses it in his day because Israel's King Jeroboam II was from the tribe of Ephraim. Jeroboam II represented Israel, and where he was from represented a high point in Israel. In one sense, today we could interchange Chicago with America or with Washington, D.C., because that is where Obama's political life was, or we could use Washington, D.C. for America. That is what is happening here, and that is why Ephraim is used so prominently in Hosea. Ephraim represented the worst of the nation.

Israel was like a trained heifer that loves to thresh. A heifer would like to thresh because threshing was a comparatively light task, made pleasant by the fact the animal was not muzzled and free to eat as it pulled the threshing sled over the gathered grain. However, Israel had abandoned this relatively easy task under God, and had insisted on being yoked in sin. So God would place a different yoke on Israel's neck, and force her to engage in the extremely grueling work of plowing, the laborious, heavy work.

Even Judah, the southern kingdom, was included in this judgment along with Jacob, the northern kingdom. In this figurative portrayal, the nation's threshing corresponded to the service God required within the covenant relationship, whereas the plowing referred to the hardship that would accompany their captivity and exile, and also the punishments that they receive normally from any physical sin that they committed.

God's people must, and will, live differently. The apostle Paul states the principle succinctly in his second letter to Timothy:

**II Timothy 2:19** Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

That is an absolute requirement. In Hosea, we find that there is a remnant that God looks to and cares for. In Hosea, the theme comes through as an appeal to God's people, physical Israel. To those whose hearts were divided, who spoke of love when they were actually unfaithful, who pretended to be truthful while lying, who pretended righteousness while sinning—God appeals to them to sow righteousness so that they can reap mercy.

**Hosea 10:12** Sow for yourselves in righteousness; reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground [or hard hearts], for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

Abundance of blessings, you know how rain pours and soaks everything. That is what God wants to put on all those who avoid iniquity and obey Him.

A brief call to covenant loyalty is included here, even in the midst of a message of condemnation and judgment. God held up a possibility of blessing, if Israel would only repent. Righteousness is not the seed, but the fruit sought, to be obtained. Isaiah quotes God saying something similar:

**Isaiah 1:18-20** “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

All throughout Hosea, God threatens to have the enemies of Israel do the dirty work, so to speak, the awful work, as He does here in Isaiah: “You shall be devoured by the sword.” Isaiah shows God challenging Israel to a formal trial. In such a trial, Israel must lose, because Israel’s self-righteousness rests upon pretended righteousness.

This fake righteousness, when examined, is nothing more than unrighteousness dripping with bright, red blood which the scarlet represents. Scarlet was a fast, or fixed color of bright red. It was very noticeable, and neither rain, washing, nor long usage would remove it. Therefore, it is used to represent the permanency of the sins of the heart. It is humanly impossible to wash them out. No human effort, no external rites, no tears, no sacrifices, no prayers are of themselves sufficient to take them away. They are deep-fixed in the heart, as the scarlet color was in the cloth, and only a sinless, almighty power could remove them or give the power to remove them.

Isaiah contrasts sinners with the obedient, who would eat the best of the land; that is, they would have bountiful crops as promised by covenant. I find it interesting that this nation is having so much trouble with their crops these days. There is supposed to be a shortage of some foods, not shortage, but the prices will go so high on some foods. We just have not been able to grow as much. It is happening more and more every year, whether it be floods or drought or pestilence.

So the righteousness God is calling for in Hosea 10:12 is of course genuine righteousness. Using agricultural imagery, Hosea urged Israel to seek God by cultivating true righteousness, and reaping His unfailing love and sure reward.

**Proverbs 11:18-19** The wicked man does deceptive work, but he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death.

Always a choice—choose life. Make righteousness your objective, and you will reap the reward; a reward, not of debt, but of abundant spiritual blessings, which are far more important than the physical blessings, but both are wonderful. The result of your sowing

for righteousness is that you reap according to the measure of mercy, which over and above repays the goodness and mercy shown to others.

**Luke 6:38** “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

You will reap at least in proportion to what you have sown, and what justice would entitle you to, and also according to the measure of the fullness of God's mercy, which is limitless.

We live in a society very similar to Hosea's time. Therefore, we face similar moral and spiritual challenges, and temptations from the world. So what must we do to assure success in combating the wrong pressures of society? There are many things that we can do; I just want to point out one that is extremely important.

The answer comes from the mouth of Jesus Christ, who put Himself forward in John 15, not as the degenerate vine that Israel had become because of their divided heart, but as the true vine, to which those who are His have been joined. To the branches of the true vine, He speaks this encouraging word:

**John 15:4-5** “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing.”

The key sentence in these two verses can mean any one of three things. It can be a simple declarative, with the sense “You must remain in Me, and I must remain in you.” It can be a promise: “Remain in Me, and I will remain in you.” It can also be a command, meaning “Remain in Me, and thus see to it that I, for My part, also remain in you.”

Probably the third of these is preferred. Jesus means that his disciples should live such righteousness lives that He will continue to abide or remain in them. The two abidings cannot be separated, and abiding is a necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness. We must spiritually abide in Christ if we are to produce spiritual fruit.

No branch bears fruit in isolation. It must have a vital connection with the vine, so to abide in Christ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian. Union with

Christ is the secret of all fruitfulness. This means that the essential element is new life from the true vine. It is union with Christ that gives us power to live a godly and fruitful life in this world. We cannot go it alone; we cannot do it alone. As we look at this nation, it cannot do it itself—unless it turns to God, calls on Jesus Christ, as far as accepting Him as personal Savior—until something like that happens, this nation cannot turn.

A great promise is given to us if we do abide in Jesus: it is that we will be fruitful. When we get discouraged, it is good to turn to a verse like this and find Christ saying that if we abide in Him, as He tells us to do, then we will be productive, whether we see the fruit of our efforts or not. As Christians, that is one of the things that can be very depressing: not to see the fruit, even though it is there. We look at things physically, but much of that fruit is spiritual, and we cannot even see it.

A vinedresser knows that a vine needs to be cultivated at least three years before being allowed to produce fruit at all. That is, it must be pruned and allowed to grow, and then pruned and allowed to grow, and so on for a considerable length of time. This relates to our sanctification process. Only after this process does it become useful for bearing fruit. In the same way, there are times in our lives when we seem to go for considerable times of time, undergoing rather radical treatment at the hands of God, and seeing very little come from it.

When this happens, we sometimes doubt whether there will ever be the fruit of righteousness, but that is only because we cannot see as God sees. We do not have His perspective. Do not get discouraged if that has happened to you before, which I am sure it has. Instead, remember that Christ promises fruit in due time, if we truly abide in Him.

Ultimately, God is the one responsible for the vineyard, and He has determined that His vineyard will be fruitful. So we have that guarantee that we also will be spiritually fruitful, as long as we abide in Christ, obedient, repentant, overcoming our sins.

**Hosea 10:12** Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

“Till He comes and rains righteousness on you” means we are going to have to wait a while for much of that righteousness to be seen, but it is developing in us. The righteousness of Christ is in us, if we are truly true Christians.

The exhortation in verse 12 actually summarizes the appeal made by Israel's prophets throughout her history, but the sinful nation had not responded properly, producing instead wickedness, evil, and deception. Rather than relying on the power of God, the nation had depended upon her own military might and her own useless gods. In verse 12, Hosea gives one more appeal to the nation to repent and seek the Lord. Fallow ground is land that has lain idle and become hard and full of weeds. This appeal sounds like the preaching of John the Baptist: "Repent, bear fruits worthy of repentance." The plow of conviction must first break up hard hearts before the seed of the Word can be planted, and the gracious rain sent from heaven.

Ancient Israel did not repent, and judgment fell. In 722 B.C., the Assyrian army invaded the land of Israel, and the 10 tribes as a nation vanished from the pages of history, except where we in the church have had it revealed where they have gone. We have been able to trace most of the apostles and through historical works. Psalm 33:12 promises "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

**Proverbs 14:34** Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

They not only did not do what God commanded, but they did the exact contrary. They cultivated wickedness; they broke up their fallow ground, yet to sow not wheat but tares. They had been full of lies, and they had lied against God by hypocrisy and idolatry, and they had spoken lies against Him by denying that He gave them what He given them, ascribing it to their idols. It was not a "Thank you, God, for the meal that we have before us." It as a "Thank you, O calf" or whatever they called upon, rather than thanking God.

**Hosea 10:13-14** You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people.

Is that not what we are having now? More and more, we are having riots and different demonstrations in our nation. The Internet was rampant with the threats of rioting if Obama lost. We have roving bands of young blacks going through the major cities, in the numbers of sometimes a hundred, just beating up tourists and people on the street. They are usually Hispanic or white. This is what we have happening in our nation, and the national media is not even bothering to cover it. Baltimore is having a horrible problem with it. Its mayor will not mention anything about it, and the police are not

allowed to do anything about it. Is this nation in tumult today?

**Hosea 10:14-15** Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered as Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—a mother dashed in pieces upon her children. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly.

I do not know how much of this book of Hosea, this prophecy, is directly related to our nation today and the Israelitish peoples around the world. But one thing we can be sure of, God is showing us what He does. He may not use all of this against our nation, or He may use it all. He is showing us what He does to handle such situations. This is how He does it.

The contrast between God's request and Israel's response heightens her guilt. So the call to repentance in verse 12 had a two-fold function: it testified to God's grace and contributed to the development of Hosea's accusation. In response to Israel's pride, God said He would destroy a source of her false confidence—her fortresses and military power. Today, we have a president who is reducing spending on the military, turning more and more of the military over to the United Nations, NATO, and other authorities.

The severity of the judgment is emphasized by a comparison with an historical incident that was apparently well-known to Hosea's contemporaries. This particular battle at Beth Arbel was vividly remembered for its atrocities, especially the wholesale slaughter of women and children. Bethel, which here represents the nation as a whole, would experience a similar fate because of her great sin. Will that happen to our nation? I sure hope not.

Is our nation worse than that ancient Israel was, at the time of Hosea? Probably—we are more able to do more wrong.

In the first ten chapters of Hosea's prophecy, the emphasis has been on the disobedience of God's people, and the inevitable judgment as a consequence. Nevertheless, there are a lot of passages that speak with detail of the blessings and glories that await a repentant, believing remnant in Israel in the days to come.

The dominant theme in the last four chapters of the book is the love of God. Beginning with chapter 11 and continuing to the end, a new emphasis on the sovereign and ultimate, triumphant love of God can be found. In this, Hosea's prophecy comes full



circle and parallels in its structure the story of the marriage on which it is built. The story of the marriage had three phases. One, there was an initial phase of love and happiness. Two, there was the second phase of Gomer's unfaithfulness in which the course of her life was continually downward. During this phase, Hosea continued to love his wife and provide for her, but her dissolute and promiscuous life led her into increasing poverty and eventually into slavery. Three, the third phase is seen in Hosea's act of redemption, in which he purchases his wife in the slave market and thereby made her his forever.

In Hosea 3:3, Hosea said to Gomer his wife, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you." On the basis of that analysis, we may say that the last four chapters of Hosea correspond to phase 3. The love of God has been present all along, but from chapters 4 to 10, the themes of discipline and judgment predominate. Now, although judgment is still present, the emphasis falls on God's prevailing and unquenchable love.

What an amazing love it is! In chapter 11, Hosea writes of the love of God in reference to Israel's past, present, and future. But in each case, there are surprises. The love of God does not operate as we might think it should. It is because God is God and not man that He acts differently, as we will see in Hosea 11:9.

**Hosea 11:1-2** "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images."

Verses 1-4 tell of Israel's past. It is not the first time in Hosea's prophecy that God has looked to this early and blissful period of His relationship to the Israelites. The story of the marriage suggests it, and there is a brief reference in Hosea 9:6. But in spite of these earlier suggestions of a happy past, we are not quite prepared for the intensity and bleakness of these verses ahead. It is impossible to read them without being moved, somewhat at least.

God compares Himself to a father who has called and trained a son, but the son has turned out to be unresponsive and ungrateful, and He is about to lose him through judgments coming soon. There are two main parts to these verses, each of which contributes to the intensity of the portrayal.

First, there is the call or election of God. Verse 1 says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." Here are two references; one historical, that is,

to the national deliverance from Egypt at the time of Moses, and one literary, to the book of Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy 7 where the text to which these words probably look back is especially instructive and interesting, because they are an explanation, in a sense, of why God chose Israel.

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8** The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

What claim did Israel have on God? None at all, and that is what these verses teach. She was not more numerous and useful; she was not more moral and devoted; there was nothing in Israel that in any way made her superior or more desirable to God than the other nations. God chose long ago, before the creation of the world, what He was going to do. The explanation of God's electing love is found in the love itself, and in no other place. He loved them because He loved them.

In Hosea 11:1, God speaks of His sovereignty in choosing Israel in the first place. They have not chosen Him, but He had chosen them. So set is His choice that He will not allow them to be totally destroyed, but will, in the future, call them from the lands into which they have been driven. That is the point of the opening sentence of Hosea 11, because here, as God begins to speak of His father-love for Israel, He reminds the people that they became His, not by birth, but by an adoption based on election. He loved them and called them, and therefore, they should love Him. Besides, God did not just adopt His people; He also cared for them in the days of their infancy, as a father cares for his son. He taught them to walk when they could only crawl, and He healed them when they became sick. He bent down to feed them when they were unable to feed themselves.

Here is the way God says it:

**Hosea 11:3-4** "I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them."

Anyone who has ever lived in a house with a baby can easily visualize these pictures. A father or mother bends over a child to hold its upraised arms. Parents and child are laughing, as he takes his first step. God says that is what He has been doing. He has been caring for Israel like a devoted parent, and without His care, Israel would surely have died. How much more does He care for us, His church, and us individually?

Yet in spite of His devoted care, Israel turned away from God as she grew older. Like the prodigal son, she went her own way into a far country. Like Hosea's wife, she turned prostitute. I remind you that this is not merely ancient Israel's story, but it is the story of the whole Israelitish race down through the ages, and it is the story of our own lives as well, before conversion. There is not one person who has not run from God, in spite of His generous, abundant grace, because all have sinned. Sadly, there are professing Christians who have turned from Him, even though they have been adopted into His Family. Only a sinful mind can scorch such a love.

The next section of the chapter, verses 5-7, deals with Israel's present, but it is a theme that we have heard again and again throughout the prophecy: Israel has turned from God. Therefore, in place of the bliss of her infant years, there is now to be the harsh and dreadful reality of God's judgment. It is not merely Israel's sin that is the problem, but rather, the grim fact that she will not repent of it.

**Hosea 11:5-7** "He shall not return to the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refuse to repent. And the sword shall slash in his cities, devour his districts, and consume them, because of their own counsels. My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Through they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him."

Here is the place at which we may also take up the last verse of chapter 11 and the first verse of chapter 12, which stand by themselves and are not closely attached to either chapter 11 or chapter 12. They are a further description of the people's guilt.

**Hosea 11:12** "Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful."

Apparently at this time, Judah had not gone anywhere as far from God as Israel had.

**Hosea 12:1** “Ephraim feeds on the wind, and pursues the east wind; he daily increases lies and desolation. Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt.”

Wind in Scripture can picture lack of substance and meaning, adversity and changeableness. It symbolizes vanity. The east wind probably refers to Assyria and to the people's attempt to gain an imagined security through alliances with her. At the same time, apparently, Israel was hedging her bets by sending produce and useful things to Egypt. God's words are firm: judgment will come in the form of a destructive invasion, and the people will be carried off to Assyria while others flee to Egypt, from which God had delivered them so many centuries before. Israel had come full circle.

But God lovingly contemplated how He would handle Israel's judgment. He decided that He would not personally carry out His wrath on them by His own hand, but what He would do was what He had done so many times before: He would use other nations to punish Israel. At this point, God steps forward to disclose the reasoning of His own heart, and He shows that the day will come when He will reclaim His people, and have them worship Him in righteousness.

Notice how heartbreaking it is for God to have to give up Israel to her enemies for scolding:

**Hosea 11:8** “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.

Admah and Zeboiim were two of the cities of the plain destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were likewise blotted out. Their names stand for swift annihilation, but on the brink of such judgment, it is God, rather than Israel, who hesitates. He asks, “How can I do it?” He must balance wrath against sin, and love for His people.

When God speaks of His love for the Israelites, He shows that they had their beginning when they were being formed into a nation, through the fiery ordeal of Egyptian bondage. From her earliest history, God loved Israel.

This love motivated God to liberate His people from Egyptian slavery. In Hosea 11:1, Israel is called not only “child,” but “My son” as well. This indicates an intimate relationship from Israel's beginning. Christ identifies Himself with His people so that His

position is theirs, and His relationship is theirs. More than once, Israel and the Messiah are viewed together as though to form a composite picture. Spiritual Israel and the church, and our Savior Jesus Christ are one body. So physical Israel needs to think that way as well, but will not until she has been through terrifying times.

The answer to the question in Hosea 11:8, "How can I give you up" is answered in verse 9:

**Hosea 11:9** "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror."

Israel's sin brought her to the brink of an irrevocable judgment. The second half of verse 9 is given as an explanation of the first half, and God says that He will not totally destroy Israel. Although the judgment will come, this will not be the end. Rather, it will be followed by another merciful regathering of the people.

**Hosea 11:10-11** "They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, then His sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses," says the Lord.

The reason God gives for His final resolution of His combination of judgment and mercy is that He is God and not man. Legally, the penalty for breaking God's law must be paid, but that is not all there is to God—and for this, we can be eternally thankful. God is a God of justice, but He is also the God who acts in love to spare His people.

We must not forget to look at God's mercies in the past, as well as in the present. At least 14 times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses uses the word "remember." Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell address to the new generation of Israelites as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land. But why would Moses ask these people to look back when they were getting ready to move forward? The reason is because a correct understanding of God's dealings in the past is essential to success in the future. By looking at the past, we see both God's judgment and mercy, motivated by His love.

There are five demonstrations of God's love described in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hosea's prophecy. The first, in Hosea 11:1-2, tells of God's love demonstrated at the exodus. The second, Hosea 11:3-4, tells of God's love demonstrated in the wilderness. Hosea

11:5-7 tell of God's love demonstrated by His longsuffering. Hosea 11:8-9 tell of God's love demonstrated by His faithfulness to His promises. And Hosea 11:10-11 tell of God's love demonstrated by the hope of future restoration.

God's mercies in the past certainly prove His love, but Hosea offered a second evidence that God loved His people. God chastises; He disciplines in the present.

**Hebrews 12:6** For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.

Chastening is not a judge inflicting punishment on a criminal in order to uphold the law. Rather, chastening is a loving parent disciplining his child in order to perfect his character and develop steadfastness in God's truth. Parents are to train up a child in the way he *should* go, so that when he is older, he has not forgotten God's way of life. God does much more with His children; He does much more with us in God's church.

Hosea must have wondered how God could say, on the one hand, "I am God and not man, the Holy One among you," and on the other hand, "I will not come in wrath." He knew that there is no lowering of God's just standards, and also that there is a love that saves. These are possible because with God, all things are possible.

The power of love, the love of God, is infinite. As a husband woos a bride, so with the bands of love, God repeatedly drew Israel to His heart. He was the lightener of her burdens, and the source of nourishment; her Healer. Nevertheless, such wicked conduct against the Great God must be dealt with, which requires His righteousness wrath and condemnation.

God never delights in judgment, but takes pleasure in mercy and grace. True, Israel is worthy of punishment, but God's love must be figured in as well. Therefore, it cries out from the innermost recesses of His whole being, "How can I give you up, Ephraim, how can I hand you over, Israel? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

He finds it impossible to give them up, though they have revolted against Him. His love is now, in the form of compassion, because in their unworthiness, they need His love all the more. He is determined that He will not execute the fierceness of His anger. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The reason God's mercy triumphs so extraordinarily is the remnant who seek and walk after the Lord, and who fear the Lord and His goodness. There is always a faithful

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remnant among the people, and that day, the Lord will set His hand to recover that remnant of His people.