

HOSEA



Read Hosea 1

Love is both powerful and mysterious. Hosea falls in love with and marries Gomer, seemingly fully aware that she is a prostitute. Gomer bears Hosea a son but refuses to stay faithful to her husband. When Gomer conceives and bears two additional children, Hosea cannot be sure that he is the father. Hosea sees in his troubled marriage a parallel with the Lord's relationship with unfaithful Israel.

Reflect: Hosea surely went into his marriage with dreams of a happy future. He believed in Gomer and in her ability to change. God similarly chose Israel out of love, with great hope for a happy future.

Pray: Lord, I thank you for loving me and believing in me, for initiating our relationship.

Act: Today I will strive to be the presence of God's love to at least one other individual, believing in and trusting that person.

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

The Family of Hosea

2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD."³ So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

4 And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel;^a for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵ On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah,^b for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. ⁷ But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen."

8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi,^c for you are not my people and I am not your God."^d

The Restoration of Israel

10^e Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be

^a That is *God sows*

^b That is *Not pitied*

^c That is *Not my people*

^d Heb *I am not yours*

^e Ch 2.1 in Heb

like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”¹¹ The people

of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of^a the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Read Hosea 2

Like the speech of an irrational jilted lover, Hosea’s words alternate between expressions of intense anger and of infatuation. The speaker is sometimes Hosea regarding Gomer and sometimes the Lord regarding Israel, with the transitions not always clear. As a lover looks longingly back to the days of courtship, so the Lord speaks about a return to the time when he courted Israel in the desert after delivering Israel from Egypt.

Reflect: The real relationship between God and Israel in the desert was anything but rosy (see Num 14:10–25). How like a lover the Lord seems to be in remembering only the good times. But then, God is love!

Pray: Lord, shape me in your image as one who treasures the good and willingly lets go of the bad.

Act: Today I will seek out one opportunity to become the image and likeness of God’s unconditional and selfless love and forgiveness.

2^b Say to your brother,^c Ammi,^d and to your sister,^e Ruhamah.^f

Israel’s Infidelity, Punishment, and Redemption

- 2 Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—
that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts,
- 3 or I will strip her naked
and expose her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and turn her into a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.
- 4 Upon her children also I will have no pity,
because they are children of whoredom.
- 5 For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, “I will go after my lovers;
they give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”
- 6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns;
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
- 7 She shall pursue her lovers,
but not overtake them;
and she shall seek them,
but shall not find them.
Then she shall say, “I will go
and return to my first husband,
for it was better with me than now.”
- 8 She did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished upon her silver
and gold that they used for Baal.
- 9 Therefore I will take back
my grain in its time,
and my wine in its season;
and I will take away my wool and my flax,
which were to cover her nakedness.
- 10 Now I will uncover her shame
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

^a Heb *rise up from*

^b Ch 2.3 in Heb

^c Gk: Heb *brothers*

^d That is *My people*

^e Gk Vg: Heb *sisters*

^f That is *Pitied*

^g Gk Syr: Heb *your*

- 11 I will put an end to all her mirth,
her festivals, her new moons, her
sabbaths,
and all her appointed festivals.
- 12 I will lay waste her vines and her fig
trees,
of which she said,
“These are my pay,
which my lovers have given me.”
I will make them a forest,
and the wild animals shall devour
them.
- 13 I will punish her for the festival days
of the Baals,
when she offered incense to them
and decked herself with her ring and
jewelry,
and went after her lovers,
and forgot me, says the LORD.
- 14 Therefore, I will now allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.
- 15 From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a
door of hope.
There she shall respond as in the
days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out
of the land of Egypt.

16 On that day, says the LORD, you will call
me, “My husband,” and no longer will you
call me, “My Baal.”^a 17 For I will remove the
names of the Baals from her mouth, and
they shall be mentioned by name no more.
18 I will make for you^b a covenant on that
day with the wild animals, the birds of the
air, and the creeping things of the ground;
and I will abolish^c the bow, the sword, and
war from the land; and I will make you lie
down in safety. 19 And I will take you for my
wife forever; I will take you for my wife in
righteousness and in justice, in steadfast
love, and in mercy. 20 I will take you for my
wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the
LORD.

- 21 On that day I will answer, says the
LORD,
I will answer the heavens
and they shall answer the earth;
22 and the earth shall answer the grain,
the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel;^d
23 and I will sow him^e for myself in
the land.
And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah,^f
and I will say to Lo-ammi,^g “You
are my people”;
and he shall say, “You are my
God.”

^a That is, “My master”

^b Heb *them*

^c Heb *break*

^d That is *God sows*

^e Cn: Heb *her*

^f That is *Not pitied*

^g That is *Not my people*

Read Hosea 3

Hosea irrationally continues to love his adulteress wife. The Lord continues in his love for unfaithful Israel. In a future time, when the Israelites will have waited long in exile without king, or priest, or sacrificial cult, they will turn back to their God. Israel and Judah will be reunited.

Reflect: In the harsh, cool light of rationality this all seems nonsense. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. And we are called to be holy, perfect, compassionate, and pure as is our God.

Pray: Lord, guide my thinking that I may come to know your ways.

Act: Today I will carefully seek to do something that is truly loving and compassionate, no matter how irrational and nonsensical it seems.

Further Assurances of God's Redeeming Love

3 The LORD said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes."² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine.^a **3** And I said to her, "You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you."⁴ For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.⁵ Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

God Accuses Israel

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
 There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
 and no knowledge of God in the land.
2 Swearing, lying, and murder,
 and stealing and adultery break out;
 bloodshed follows bloodshed.
3 Therefore the land mourns,
 and all who live in it languish;
 together with the wild animals
 and the birds of the air,
 even the fish of the sea are perishing.
4 Yet let no one contend,
 and let none accuse,
 for with you is my contention, O priest.^b
5 You shall stumble by day;
 the prophet also shall stumble with you by night,
 and I will destroy your mother.
6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
 because you have rejected knowledge,
 I reject you from being a priest to me.
 And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
 I also will forget your children.
7 The more they increased,
 the more they sinned against me;
 they changed^c their glory into shame.
8 They feed on the sin of my people;
 they are greedy for their iniquity.
9 And it shall be like people, like priest;
 I will punish them for their ways,
 and repay them for their deeds.

^a Gk: Heb a homer of barley and a lethech of barley

^b Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Ancient Heb tradition: MT I will change

Read Hosea 4

As if for a lawsuit, Hosea proclaims the Lord's grievance against Israel, especially its priests and prophets. Because of them there is no knowledge of God in the land. Lying oaths, theft, and bloodshed have displaced mercy and fidelity. The land itself mourns, and everything in it languishes. Animals, birds, and even fish perish. The people, lacking understanding, come to ruin.

Reflect: Unleashed, sin and evil become powers unto themselves. Sin's effects extend far beyond just those who sin. Those who should know, priests and prophets, stumble—and along with them, misguided people suffer and even nature itself mourns.

Pray: Lord, through my prayerful study of your word, give me knowledge of you, that my stumbling may not bring pain to others.

Act: Today, I will seek a circumstance to which my response will model God's mercy and fidelity.

- 10 They shall eat, but not be satisfied;
they shall play the whore, but not multiply;
because they have forsaken the LORD
to devote themselves to ¹¹ whoredom.

The Idolatry of Israel

Wine and new wine
take away the understanding.

- 12 My people consult a piece of wood,
and their divining rod gives them oracles.
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,
and they have played the whore, forsaking
their God.
- 13 They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains,
and make offerings upon the hills,
under oak, poplar, and terebinth,
because their shade is good.
- Therefore your daughters play the whore,
and your daughters-in-law commit adultery.
- 14 I will not punish your daughters when they play
the whore,
nor your daughters-in-law when they commit
adultery;
for the men themselves go aside with whores,
and sacrifice with temple prostitutes;
thus a people without understanding comes to
ruin.
- 15 Though you play the whore, O Israel,
do not let Judah become guilty.
Do not enter into Gilgal,
or go up to Beth-aven,
and do not swear, "As the LORD lives."
- 16 Like a stubborn heifer,
Israel is stubborn;
can the LORD now feed them
like a lamb in a broad pasture?
- 17 Ephraim is joined to idols—
let him alone.
- 18 When their drinking is ended, they indulge in
sexual orgies;
they love lewdness more than their glory.^a
- 19 A wind has wrapped them^b in its wings,
and they shall be ashamed because of their
altars.^c

Impending Judgment on Israel and Judah

- 5** Hear this, O priests!
Give heed, O house of Israel!
Listen, O house of the king!

^a Cn Compare Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Heb *her*

^c Gk Syr: Heb *sacrifices*

Read Hosea 5

Like seriously ill people who do everything but see a reputable physician; Israel looks to Assyria for healing. Israel's priests and royal court have become a deadly snare for its people. Now when Israel seeks the Lord he is absent. The Lord has withdrawn to his own place until Israel changes its ways and seeks the presence of its holy God.

Reflect: For Hosea, Israel's only resort is absolute reliance upon God for security. How much easier and more sensible it must have seemed to seek alliances with powerful foreign nations like Assyria, so that life could continue as it was.

Pray: Lord, give me the grace to be willing to alter my ways of thinking and behaving rather than jumping at deceptively easy but ultimately costly answers that keep things comfortable.

Act: Today I will make decisions in the light of what I sense to be truly God's will.

- For the judgment pertains to you;
for you have been a snare at Mizpah,
and a net spread upon Tabor,
2 and a pit dug deep in Shittim;^a
but I will punish all of them.
- 3 I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;
for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
Israel is defiled.
- 4 Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.
For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
and they do not know the LORD.
- 5 Israel's pride testifies against him;
Ephraim^b stumbles in his guilt;
Judah also stumbles with them.
- 6 With their flocks and herds they shall go
to seek the LORD,
but they will not find him;
he has withdrawn from them.
- 7 They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD;
for they have borne illegitimate children.
Now the new moon shall devour them along
with their fields.
- 8 Blow the horn in Gibeah,
the trumpet in Ramah.
Sound the alarm at Beth-aven;
look behind you, Benjamin!
- 9 Ephraim shall become a desolation
in the day of punishment;
among the tribes of Israel
I declare what is sure.
- 10 The princes of Judah have become
like those who remove the landmark;
on them I will pour out
my wrath like water.
- 11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,
because he was determined to go after vanity.^c
- 12 Therefore I am like maggots to Ephraim,
and like rotteness to the house of Judah.
- 13 When Ephraim saw his sickness,
and Judah his wound,
then Ephraim went to Assyria,
and sent to the great king.^d
But he is not able to cure you
or heal your wound.
- 14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I myself will tear and go away;

^a Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Heb *Israel and Ephraim*

^c Gk: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Cn: Heb *to a king who will contend*

I will carry off, and no one shall
rescue.

¹⁵ I will return again to my place

until they acknowledge their guilt
and seek my face.

In their distress they will beg my favor:

Read Hosea 6

Israel does confidently return to God—but without a thought for repentance. Its people assert that he who has rent and stricken will heal and bind up their wounds. As certain as the dawn is his coming, like the spring rain. Even as they speak, God sees that their piety is like a morning cloud. While God seeks love and knowledge of his will, Israel resorts to empty ritual.

Reflect: How very arbitrary is Israel's concept of its God. Hosea indicates that the people are not even vaguely aware that they have brought their wounds upon themselves.

Pray: Lord, as important as prayer and ritual are, never let them become for me a substitute for doing your will and living in accord with your commandments.

Act: Today I will let my loving thoughts and actions toward all whom I encounter be my act of worship.

A Call to Repentance

6 “Come, let us return to the LORD;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
³ Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”

Impenitence of Israel and Judah

⁴ What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes away early.
⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
I have killed them by the words of my mouth,
and my^a judgment goes forth as the light.
⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
⁷ But at^b Adam they transgressed the covenant;
there they dealt faithlessly with me.
⁸ Gilead is a city of evildoers,
tracked with blood.
⁹ As robbers lie in wait^c for someone,
so the priests are banded together;^d
they murder on the road to Shechem,
they commit a monstrous crime.
¹⁰ In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;
Ephraim's whoredom is there, Israel is defiled.
¹¹ For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.

7 ¹ When I would restore the fortunes of my people,
when I would heal Israel,
the corruption of Ephraim is revealed,
and the wicked deeds of Samaria;
for they deal falsely,
the thief breaks in,
and the bandits raid outside.
² But they do not consider
that I remember all their wickedness.
Now their deeds surround them,
they are before my face.
³ By their wickedness they make the king glad,

^a Gk Syr: Heb *your*

^b Cn: Heb *like*

^c Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Syr: Heb are a *company*

Read Hosea 7

Israel's royal court and its military are consumed with intrigue as pro-Egyptian and pro-Assyrian factions conspire and plot against each other. Kings are assassinated and replaced, foreign alliances are made and broken, all at the expense of Israel's people, and all with no thought to Israel's God and his will.

Reflect: Israel's officials and leaders are so absorbed in their own interests and concerns they seem totally unaware of the ruin and destruction they are rapidly bringing upon themselves and the people of their nation.

Pray: Lord, give us the wisdom to select just leaders who will put people's needs ahead of ambition and self-interest, who will manage and distribute resources with equity, and who will demonstrate concern for the needs of future generations.

Act: Today I will pay attention to the activities and decisions of world, national, and local leaders and politicians, applying Hosea as the measure.

- and the officials by their treachery.
- 4 They are all adulterers;
they are like a heated oven,
whose baker does not need to stir the fire,
from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.
- 5 On the day of our king the officials
became sick with the heat of wine;
he stretched out his hand with mockers.
- 6 For they are kindled^a like an oven, their heart
burns within them;
all night their anger smolders;
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.
- 7 All of them are hot as an oven,
and they devour their rulers.
All their kings have fallen;
none of them calls upon me.
- 8 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.
- 9 Foreigners devour his strength,
but he does not know it;
gray hairs are sprinkled upon him,
but he does not know it.
- 10 Israel's pride testifies against^b him;
yet they do not return to the LORD their God,
or seek him, for all this.

Futile Reliance on the Nations

- 11 Ephraim has become like a dove,
silly and without sense;
they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria.
- 12 As they go, I will cast my net over them;
I will bring them down like birds of the air;
I will discipline them according to the report
made to their assembly.^c
- 13 Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!
Destruction to them, for they have rebelled
against me!
I would redeem them,
but they speak lies against me.
- 14 They do not cry to me from the heart,
but they wait upon their beds;
they gash themselves for grain and wine;
they rebel against me.
- 15 It was I who trained and strengthened their arms,
yet they plot evil against me.
- 16 They turn to that which does not profit;^d
they have become like a defective bow;
their officials shall fall by the sword
because of the rage of their tongue.
So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt.

^a Gk Syr: Heb brought near

^b Or humbles

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

Read Hosea 8

Israel pays lip service to the Lord, claiming to know God, while living in violation of the covenant and sinning against the law. Without seeking the Lord's guidance, like an undisciplined wild ass, Israel has tried to bargain with Assyria. Now Assyria is swallowing Israel into its empire. God's people will become merely one among the multiple vassals of the Assyrian king.

Reflect: Israel, chosen by God out of all the nations on earth to be God's very own people has exchanged its privilege for the status of vassal to the king of Assyria.

Pray: Lord, may I never forget or abandon the gift of membership among your chosen, holy people.

Act: Today I will focus on my status as a member of God's holy people, conscious that during this day multiple temptations to compromise that status may arise.

Israel's Apostasy

- 8** Set the trumpet to your lips!
 One like a vulture^a is over the house of the LORD,
 because they have broken my covenant,
 and transgressed my law.
- 2** Israel cries to me,
 "My God, we—Israel—know you!"
- 3** Israel has spurned the good;
 the enemy shall pursue him.
- 4** They made kings, but not through me;
 they set up princes, but without my knowledge.
 With their silver and gold they made idols
 for their own destruction.
- 5** Your calf is rejected, O Samaria.
 My anger burns against them.
 How long will they be incapable of innocence?
- 6** For it is from Israel,
 an artisan made it;
 it is not God.
 The calf of Samaria
 shall be broken to pieces.^b
- 7** For they sow the wind,
 and they shall reap the whirlwind.
 The standing grain has no heads,
 it shall yield no meal;
 if it were to yield,
 foreigners would devour it.
- 8** Israel is swallowed up;
 now they are among the nations
 as a useless vessel.
- 9** For they have gone up to Assyria,
 a wild ass wandering alone;
 Ephraim has bargained for lovers.
- 10** Though they bargain with the nations,
 I will now gather them up.
 They shall soon writhe
 under the burden of kings and princes.
- 11** When Ephraim multiplied altars to expiate sin,
 they became to him altars for sinning.
- 12** Though I write for him the multitude of my
 instructions,
 they are regarded as a strange thing.
- 13** Though they offer choice sacrifices,^c
 though they eat flesh,
 the LORD does not accept them.
 Now he will remember their iniquity,
 and punish their sins;
 they shall return to Egypt.

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Or shall go up in flames

^c Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

14 Israel has forgotten his Maker,
and built palaces;
and Judah has multiplied fortified cities;

but I will send a fire upon his
cities,
and it shall devour his strongholds.

Read Hosea 9

Because Israel persists in being unfaithful to its God, it can no longer dwell in God's holy land. Having become like other nations, Israel must now dwell among those nations. Its people will eat unclean food and no longer be able to gather for festive banquets in the presence of their holy God. Israel's leaders scornfully respond to Hosea's message: "The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad!"

Reflect: A prophet's ability to perceive the truth behind carefully constructed facades can elicit surprise, amusement, contempt, and scorn.

Pray: Lord, give me the courage to faithfully witness to your will in all my interactions, even when such witness might result in rejection and ridicule.

Act: In my dealings I will watch for situations where the tone of the conversation or the line of thought runs contrary to my understanding of God's will. On at least one such occasion in the near future I will take the risk of expressing my concerns.

Punishment for Israel's Sin

- 9** Do not rejoice, O Israel!
Do not exult^a as other nations do;
for you have played the whore, departing from
your God.
You have loved a prostitute's pay
on all threshing floors.
- 2 Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them,
and the new wine shall fail them.
- 3 They shall not remain in the land of the LORD;
but Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food.
- 4 They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the
LORD,
and their sacrifices shall not please him.
Such sacrifices shall be like mourners' bread;
all who eat of it shall be defiled;
for their bread shall be for their hunger only;
it shall not come to the house of the LORD.
- 5 What will you do on the day of appointed festival,
and on the day of the festival of the LORD?
- 6 For even if they escape destruction,
Egypt shall gather them,
Memphis shall bury them.
Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver;^b
thorns shall be in their tents.
- 7 The days of punishment have come,
the days of recompense have come;
Israel cries,^c
"The prophet is a fool,
the man of the spirit is mad!"
Because of your great iniquity,
your hostility is great.
- 8 The prophet is a sentinel for my God over Ephraim,
yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways,
and hostility in the house of his God.
- 9 They have deeply corrupted themselves
as in the days of Gibeah;
he will remember their iniquity,
he will punish their sins.
- 10 Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree,
in its first season,
I saw your ancestors.

^a Gk: Heb *To exultation*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Cn Compare Gk: Heb *shall know*

- But they came to Baal-peor,
and consecrated themselves to a
thing of shame,
and became detestable like the
thing they loved.
- 11 Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a
bird—
no birth, no pregnancy, no
conception!
- 12 Even if they bring up children,
I will bereave them until no one is
left.
Woe to them indeed
when I depart from them!
- 13 Once I saw Ephraim as a young
palm planted in a lovely meadow,^a
but now Ephraim must lead out
his children for slaughter.
- 14 Give them, O LORD—
what will you give?
- Give them a miscarrying womb
and dry breasts.
- 15 Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal;
there I came to hate them.
Because of the wickedness of their
deeds
I will drive them out of my house.
I will love them no more;
all their officials are rebels.
- 16 Ephraim is stricken,
their root is dried up,
they shall bear no fruit.
Even though they give birth,
I will kill the cherished offspring of
their womb.
- 17 Because they have not listened to him,
my God will reject them;
they shall become wanderers
among the nations.

Israel's Sin and Captivity

- 10** Israel is a luxuriant vine
that yields its fruit.
The more his fruit increased
the more altars he built;
as his country improved,
he improved his pillars.
- 2 Their heart is false;
now they must bear their guilt.
The LORD^b will break down their altars,
and destroy their pillars.
- 3 For now they will say:
“We have no king,
for we do not fear the LORD,
and a king—what could he do for us?”
- 4 They utter mere words;
with empty oaths they make covenants;
so litigation springs up like poisonous weeds
in the furrows of the field.
- 5 The inhabitants of Samaria tremble
for the calf^c of Beth-aven.
Its people shall mourn for it,
and its idolatrous priests shall wail^d over it,
over its glory that has departed from it.
- 6 The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria
as tribute to the great king.^e
Ephraim shall be put to shame,
and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.^f

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Heb *he*

^c Gk Syr: Heb *calves*

^d Cn: Heb *exult*

^e Cn: Heb *to a king who will contend*

^f Cn: Heb *counsel*

Read Hosea 10

Israel knew a long period of abundance and prosperity, which only took it away from its God. Greed led to a distorted legal system. Kings made promises they could not keep, moving the nation into costly and destructive alliances. Instead of seeking the Lord and his justice, Israel cultivated wickedness. Now it must reap perversity and eat the fruit of its falsehoods.

Reflect: Although the time to seek the Lord came some time back, Israel continues to trust in its chariots and in its many warriors.

Pray: Lord, help me to break up a new field and in its furrows sow justice, that I may reap from you the fruits of piety.

Act: Today I will strive to make of my words seeds of justice to be planted within those who hear me, trusting that some of those seeds might take root.

- 7 Samaria's king shall perish
like a chip on the face of the waters.
- 8 The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,
shall be destroyed.
Thorn and thistle shall grow up
on their altars.
They shall say to the mountains, Cover us,
and to the hills, Fall on us.
- 9 Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned,
O Israel;
there they have continued.
Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah?
- 10 I will come^a against the wayward people to
punish them;
and nations shall be gathered against them
when they are punished^b for their double
iniquity.
- 11 Ephraim was a trained heifer
that loved to thresh,
and I spared her fair neck;
but I will make Ephraim break the ground;
Judah must plow;
Jacob must harrow for himself.
- 12 Sow for yourselves righteousness;
reap steadfast love;
break up your fallow ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
that he may come and rain righteousness
upon you.
- 13 You have plowed wickedness,
you have reaped injustice,
you have eaten the fruit of lies.
Because you have trusted in your power
and in the multitude of your warriors,
- 14 therefore the tumult of war shall rise against your
people,
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,
as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of
battle
when mothers were dashed in pieces with their
children.
- 15 Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,
because of your great wickedness.
At dawn the king of Israel
shall be utterly cut off.

^a Cn Compare Gk: Heb *In my desire*

^b Gk: Heb *bound*

Read Hosea 11

In a moment of intense compassion, Hosea's expectations of God as the Holy One among us are reversed. Humans might give up on undisciplined Israel, giving vent to consuming anger. But, at this moment, such a response is not that of God, the God who called Israel as a child out of Egypt, who taught Ephraim to walk, who held Israel to his cheeks, who stooped to feed her child.

Reflect: Words, even those of scripture, cannot entrap God. Sometimes the all-holy God cannot remain among an unholy people. But here the divine Holy One among us loves with the unconditional love of a parent, even for an unappreciative child.

Pray: Lord, I thank you for calling me to be your child, for embracing and nourishing me, and for teaching me to walk in your paths.

Act: Today I will seek to be the presence of God's unconditional love in all my dealings.

God's Compassion Despite Israel's Ingratitude

- 11** When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
- ² The more I^a called them,
the more they went from me;^b
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.
- ³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my^c arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
- ⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.^d
I bent down to them and fed them.
- ⁵ They shall return to the land of Egypt,
and Assyria shall be their king,
because they have refused to return to me.
- ⁶ The sword rages in their cities,
it consumes their oracle-priests,
and devours because of their schemes.
- ⁷ My people are bent on turning away from me.
To the Most High they call,
but he does not raise them up at all.^e
- ⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.
- ⁹ I will not execute my fierce anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and no mortal,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.^f
- ¹⁰ They shall go after the LORD,
who roars like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west.
- ¹¹ They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.
- ^{12f} Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
and the house of Israel with deceit;
but Judah still walks^g with God,
and is faithful to the Holy One.

^a Gk: Heb *they*

^b Gk: Heb *them*

^c Gk Syr Vg: Heb *his*

^d Or *who ease the yoke on their jaws*

^e Meaning of Heb uncertain

^f Ch 12.1 in Heb

^g Heb *roams or rules*

Read Hosea 12

Again in lawsuit form, God announces a grievance. For Israel's ancestor Jacob (whose name was later changed to Israel) deception was a way of life (Gen 25:19—34:43). Now in Israel (alternately called Ephraim), lies and falsehoods are many. Its merchants amass fortunes by fraud and deceit. As Jacob had to pay for his deceit, so Israel will pay for its infidelity.

Reflect: God, the Holy One, is faithful. Jacob's encounters with his holy and faithful God were life changing. There is hope for Jacob's descendants to also return through loyalty and doing what is right.

Pray: Lord, grant that I, like Jacob, may learn to rely more upon you and less upon myself, especially on my own plans, schemes, and cunning.

Act: As I go about my day, I will reflect upon my motives and my methods. I will strive to conform my thinking to that of God.

12 Ephraim herds the wind,
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a treaty with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

The Long History of Rebellion

- 2 The LORD has an indictment against Judah,
and will punish Jacob according to his ways,
and repay him according to his deeds.
- 3 In the womb he tried to supplant his brother,
and in his manhood he strove with God.
- 4 He strove with the angel and prevailed,
he wept and sought his favor;
he met him at Bethel,
and there he spoke with him.^a
- 5 The LORD the God of hosts,
the LORD is his name!
- 6 But as for you, return to your God,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.
- 7 A trader, in whose hands are false balances,
he loves to oppress.
- 8 Ephraim has said, "Ah, I am rich,
I have gained wealth for myself;
in all of my gain
no offense has been found in me
that would be sin."^b
- 9 I am the LORD your God
from the land of Egypt;
I will make you live in tents again,
as in the days of the appointed festival.
- 10 I spoke to the prophets;
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets I will bring destruction.
- 11 In Gilead^c there is iniquity,
they shall surely come to nothing.
In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls,
so their altars shall be like stone heaps
on the furrows of the field.
- 12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram,
there Israel served for a wife,
and for a wife he guarded sheep.^d
- 13 By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from
Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.
- 14 Ephraim has given bitter offense,
so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him
and pay him back for his insults.

^a Gk Syr: Heb *us*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Compare Syr: Heb *Gilead*

^d Heb lacks *sheep*

Read Hosea 13

Samaria was Israel's thriving capital, the home of its kings. Ephraim was the most prosperous of the tribes. Baal-worship with its images of calves as the source of prosperity supplanted religion centered on the God who had heard and responded to oppressed Israel's cries in Egypt. Lacking the wisdom to return to its God of freedom and life, Israel must perish.

Reflect: How easy it is to rely on God when life is difficult. The Lord alone saved Israel from Egypt. The Lord fed them in the torrid desert. But, in prosperous times a satisfied Israel became proud of heart, forgetting its God.

Pray: Lord, grant me the wisdom to always remember that you alone are the source of all that is truly good.

Act: Today I will count my blessings as they come, and will remember and thank God, who has been with me always.

Relentless Judgment on Israel

- 13** When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;
he was exalted in Israel;
but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.
- 2 And now they keep on sinning
and make a cast image for themselves,
idols of silver made according to their
understanding,
all of them the work of artisans.
“Sacrifice to these,” they say.^a
People are kissing calves!
- 3 Therefore they shall be like the morning mist
or like the dew that goes away early,
like chaff that swirls from the threshing floor
or like smoke from a window.
- 4 Yet I have been the LORD your God
ever since the land of Egypt;
you know no God but me,
and besides me there is no savior.
- 5 It was I who fed^b you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought.
- 6 When I fed^c them, they were satisfied;
they were satisfied, and their heart was proud;
therefore they forgot me.
- 7 So I will become like a lion to them,
like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.
- 8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her
cubs,
and will tear open the covering of their heart;
there I will devour them like a lion,
as a wild animal would mangle them.
- 9 I will destroy you, O Israel;
who can help you?^d
- 10 Where now is^e your king, that he may save you?
Where in all your cities are your rulers,
of whom you said,
“Give me a king and rulers?”
- 11 I gave you a king in my anger,
and I took him away in my wrath.
- 12 Ephraim's iniquity is bound up;
his sin is kept in store.
- 13 The pangs of childbirth come for him,
but he is an unwise son;
for at the proper time he does not present himself
at the mouth of the womb.
- 14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?
O Death, where are^f your plagues?
O Sheol, where is^f your destruction?

^a Cn Compare Gk: Heb *To these they say sacrifices of people*

^b Gk Syr: Heb *knew*

^c Cn: Heb *according to their pasture*

^d Gk Syr: Heb *for in me is your help*

^e Gk Syr Vg: Heb *I will be*

^f Gk Syr: Heb *I will be*

Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

- 15 Although he may flourish among rushes,^a the east wind shall come, a blast from the LORD, rising from the wilderness; and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched.

It shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.
 16^b Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

Read Hosea 14

Hosea concludes on a positive note. Israel must seek forgiveness and return to its compassionate Lord, for Assyria cannot save, nor can gods built by human hands. Anticipating a positive response, the Lord gets the final word. He will heal Israel's defection. Humbled, Israel will again prosper. Again God's people will dwell in the shade and raise grain. Israel will bear fruit.

Reflect: What powers do I rely upon for salvation? To what extent do I put all my trust in the work of my own hands? In the work of others' hands? What would it mean for me to return to the Lord?

Pray: Lord, be my dew that I may strike root, put forth shoots, blossom, and bear you abundant fruit.

Act: As I go about my day, I will be mindful of the Lord's presence with me to save and to bear fruit.

A Plea for Repentance

- 14** Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
 2 Take words with you and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit^c of our lips.
 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; we will say no more, "Our God," to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy."

Assurance of Forgiveness

- 4 I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.
 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.^d
 6 His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.
 7 They shall again live beneath my^e shadow, they shall flourish as a garden;^f they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
 8 O Ephraim, what have I^g to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you.^h I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulnessⁱ comes from me.
 9 Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

^a Or among brothers

^b Ch 14.1 in Heb

^c Gk Syr: Heb bulls

^d Cn: Heb like Lebanon

^e Heb his

^f Cn: Heb they shall grow grain

^g Or What more has Ephraim

^h Heb him

ⁱ Heb your fruit