**The Author and Date of Writing**

Hosea / Hoshea / Oshea – meaning salvation.

The book is named after its author. Historically and to distinguish between the individuals concerned, English language Bibles always give the name of the prophet as being Hosea and name the 19th and last king of the Northern Kingdom, Hoshea. The two names are exactly the same in original texts.

The names Hosea, Joshua, and Jesus (the Greek form of Yehoshua), are all derived from the same Hebrew word, *hoshea*, which means ‘salvation.’ Both Joshua and Jesus include the meaning ‘Yahweh is salvation.’ As God’s messenger, Hosea offers salvation to the nation if they will turn from their idolatry and return to the Lord.

The author is the son of Beeri and the husband of Gomer (**1:3**). Hosea is believed to have been a citizen of northern Israel, based on his message being to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and he calls the king of Samaria ‘our king’ (**7:5**). This is the sum of all we have in respect of personal detail about Hosea, Beeri and Gomer - none of these three people are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, albeit Paul quotes Hosea in his letter to the Romans (**Romans 9:25** – see below).

Hosea’s ministry is dated between 760-710BC. **Hosea 1:1** states the Lord’s word came to him during the reigns of the following kings:

* Judah: Uzziah (Azariah) (767-740)

Jotham (740-732)

Ahaz (732-716)

Hezekiah (716-687)

* Israel: Jeroboam II (782-753)

Five kings reigned in the Northern Kingdom during Hosea’s ministry:

* Jeroboam 782-753 (gave throne to his son)
* Zechariah 753-752 (assassinated)
* Shallum 752 (assassinated)
* Menahem 752-742 (gave throne to his son),
* Pekahiah 742-740 (overthrown in coup d’etat)
* Pekah 740-732 (assassinated)
* Hoshea 732-712BC (died in exile)

There is no clear reason why Hosea mentions only Jeroboam, however suggestions include:

* Jeroboam had the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty (**Hosea 3:5**), whilst the others presided over the instability and disintegration of the Northern kingship (**Hosea 7:3-7**).
* The kings that followed Jeroboam were relative insignificance and continued in the sins of Jeroboam I, son of Nebat – none of the Northern kings were described as ‘good’.

**Other Biblical references to Hosea**

Outside this Book, the only other Biblical reference to Hosea is in **Romans 9:25-26**, where Hosea **2:23** and **1:10** are quoted by Paul.

**Overview of Book**

Hosea writes to demonstrate the unchanging and unfailing love of God for Israel, despite her continued unfaithfulness. This is illustrated through Hosea’s marriage to unfaithful Gomer – but we are shown a forgiving and compassionate God who longs to bless His people with the knowledge of Himself.

As previously seen in the writings of Amos, the Northern Kingdom has become corrupt, both in public and private life, moving from the covenant relationship they had with God. Hosea aims to get his countrymen to repent and return to their patient and ever-loving God. This is shown by God’s love to Israel as His own dear children and as His covenant wife.

## The Messiah revealed within the Book

## Hosea presents the Messiah as:

## the Son of God (11:1 / Matthew 2:15)

## the only Saviour of His people (13:4 with John 14:6)

## the one who will ransom us from the dead (13:14 with 1 Cor. 15:55)

## the one who loves us with great compassion (11:4)

## the one who heals those who will return to Him (6:1).

**Hosea 1:1 Introduction to the Prophet**

**1 The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel:**

**The word of the LORD**: One definition of a prophet is someone who is the ‘proclaimer of the will of God’. This title would fit Hosea, even though he doesn’t claim it himself.

**Son of Beeri**: As much as we know about Hosea as a person is laid out in this and a couple of other verses in chapter 1.

* His father was Beeri
* His wife was Gomer (**1:3**)
* They had two sons and a daughter (**1:4, 6, 9**).

**…kings of Judah … king of Israel**: Hosea's ministry was during the time when Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel were split. This is about 250 years after the time of King David and 650 years after Israel came into the Promised Land.

**Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah**: Whilst Hosea’s ministry is clearly towards the Northern kingdom of Israel, he refers to the southern state of Judah by naming their kings too.

**Jeroboam… king of Israel**: From a political and economic perspective, Jeroboam II was a successful king (**2 Kings 14:23-29**), but the same could not be said in respect of the spiritual and moral aspects of the country. This decline was already present and would increase over the forty years that followed Jeroboam’s reign – of the six kings that held power, six kings, four were violently overthrown and one died as a conquered exile in Assyria.

The people were not looking towards God in Hosea’s time and they would end up paying the price in terms of God’s judgement.

**Hosea 1:1-2 The command to take a prostitute as a wife.**

**2When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.’**

**…the LORD said to him…**: God's first words to Hosea appear to be relating to his own life – no doubt Hosea would have preferred that God gave him a word for someone else. ‘…before a prophet can deliver God’s message to a nation, he first has to be right with God.’ (Guzik) (e.g., Jonah).

**Go, marry a promiscuous woman**: The Hebrew word used describes his wife as a prostitute. God is doing this as **this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD**.

There is an ongoing word picture throughout the Old Testament - the LORD is the husband of Israel, but the people are unfaithful (as a prostitute). The people had removed God from His rightful place at the centre.

‘We cannot say that God grieves exactly as we grieve, if only because He controls all things and always works them out in accordance with His own good pleasure. Nevertheless, there is a parallel between God's feelings and ours.’" (Boice)

Many commentators press the idea that Gomer was not a prostitute when Hosea first met and married her, she only became that later and Hosea knew from the LORD that she would become that. This may be the case, but we don't know this from the text.

**Hosea 1:3-5 Hosea's marriage to Gomer and their first son.**

**3So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4Then the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. 5In that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel.’**

**So he married Gomer**: We presume Hosea would not have married a prostitute except by the commandment of the LORD, yet he was obedient to God’s command. ‘Hosea didn’t find a sinful woman and through love and kindness restored her to virtue. He married a prostitute - no doubt hoping she would give up her sin and be devoted only to him - but she stayed a prostitute.’ (Guzik)

‘…this follows the pattern of human nature. When Hosea and Gomer first married, she probably promised eternal love and devotion. She probably showed every sign of being committed to Hosea, but went back to prostitution. We don’t know why, but whatever excuse she had, we share the same inexcusable reasons for our idolatry, when we prefer another god to the LORD God.’ (Guzik)

Some commentators believe this never really happened – Hosea is merely telling a vivid story, as God would never have a prophet marry a prostitute. ‘If Hosea's story is unreal (because God could not ask a man to marry an unfaithful woman), then neither is the story of salvation real, because that is precisely what Christ has done for us.’ (Boice)

**Call him Jezreel**: The name **Jezreel** means ‘he sows’. Some commentators say it means ‘scattered’, speaking of Israel soon to be scattered into exile by a conquering Assyrian army.

The verse also refers to the Valley of Jezreel, where Jehu – great-grandfather of Jeroboam – killed all the descendants of Ahab, to strengthen his claim to the throne (**2 Kings 10:11**). God directs Hosea to name his son **Jezreel** as a reminder of His promise to **punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel**. After Jeroboam’s death in 752 BC, his son Zechariah reigned six months before being assassinated (**2 Kings 15:8-10**), which ended the **house of Jehu**.

**…and I will put an end to the house of Israel**: In time, the whole Northern Kingdom of Israel would fall to the Assyrian Empire (**2 Kings 17:20-23**) and this took place before the completion of Hosea’s ministry.

**…break Israel’s bow…**: ‘The bow was a symbol of power in a day when it was the principle instrument of warfare. …a broken bow symbolised the loss of power." (Hubbard)

**Hosea 1:6-7 A daughter born to Hosea and Gomer.**

**6Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means “not loved”), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them. 7Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them – not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the Lord their God, will save them.’**

**Call her name Lo-Ruhamah**: The name **Lo-Ruhamah** means ‘no mercy.’ The child’s name would remind her parents and the people around of the coming judgment.

**Yet I will show love to Judah…**: The Assyrian army also attacked Judah, but were unable to conquer the country - God miraculously fought on behalf of Judah (**2 Kings 19:35**), with the angel of the LORD killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night.

‘Why did God choose to have mercy on Judah, but not Israel?

* Judah and her kings were more faithful to the Lord during these years (e.g., King Hezekiah **2 Kings 18:1-8**).
* It is not a matter of worthiness - because by its very nature mercy is mercy. If one deserves leniency, then leniency is a matter of justice, not mercy. Mercy is only shown to the guilty. Therefore, it is God’s grace that will show mercy to whom He will show mercy (**Romans 9:15**). No one is ever unfair for not showing mercy.’ (Guzik)

**Hosea 1:8-9 A second son born to Hosea and Gomer.**

**8After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. 9Then the Lord said, ‘Call him Lo-Ammi (which means “not my people”), for you are not my people and I am not your God.**

**Call his name Lo-Ammi**: The name **Lo-Ammi** means ‘not my people’. This child would remind everyone that the people of Israel had left God and should no longer be considered His **people**.

‘Since Gomer did not give up her prostitution, there may have been a cruel irony in the name **Lo-Ammi**. Perhaps this son really was not the son of Hosea, but of another man. Perhaps the appearance of the child made this evident. The message God had to deliver to Israel through Hosea was hard enough, but God also made Hosea have to live it.’ (Guzik)

**…for you are not my people and I am not your God**: This is God’s statement of fact. The people of Israel showed no desire to be God’s people and now God says that He no longer wants them. The people have rejected God and the LORD simply acknowledges that fact - any pretence from either side is over.

**Hosea 1:10-2:1 A promise of restoration.**

**10‘Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people”, they will be called “children of the living God”. 11The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel**

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

*The Hebrew texts for Hosea 1:10-12, are numbered 2:1-2, as a separate chapter.*

**Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore…**: God has promised judgment and that will come, but it will be for a limited time. Afterwards there will come restoration, bringing prosperity, increase and blessing. One day Israel will return to the LORD and once again they will be called **children of the living God**. The prophecy regarding **Lo-Ammi** (**1:9**) will have been complete and reversed.

**The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together**: God’s promise of restoration will reverse the divisions caused by the civil war of Rehoboam and Jeroboam I. In a way this promise is fulfilled by the church, where God brings together Israel, Judah - and even Gentiles - into one body **Ephesians 2:14-16**.

**…for great will be the day of Jezreel**: Despite Hosea’s first child being named Jezreel to indicate a sign of judgment, through the restoration, that name will one day signify greatness.

**Say of your brothers, ‘My people’ and of your sisters ‘My loved one’**: The other two children (Lo-Ruhamah, ‘No Mercy’ and Lo-Ammi, ‘Not My People’) have their names redeemed as Israel again in regarded as God’s people, as mercy is shown to them.

God’s offer of redemption is on offer to all people.

**Hosea 2:1-3 The accusation against Israel**

**2‘Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.
3Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land and slay her with thirst.**

**…for she is not My wife**: God compares Israel to an adulterous wife – someone who is no longer worthy to be compared to a wife. He is saying the relationship they once had has been broken as Israel has followed other gods.

**Otherwise I will strip her naked …I will make her like a desert**: God warns that if Israel doesn’t turn back to Him, she will be judged. Although the relationship has gone, the promise of God’s blessings are still present, though even those will be removed if Israel does not alter its ways.

**Hosea 2:4-5 Israel tries to justify her behaviour**

**4I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. 5Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, “I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my drink.’**

**I will not show my love to her children**: If Israel represents the unfaithful wife, the children are the individual people of Israel. God’s makes it clear that responsibility is both corporate and personal. Every person has responsibility for their own actions in respect of their relationship with God and all of those small relationships build into a corporate relationship which is that of the country. No one will be able to hide behind an argument that blames others for your own failure to follow the Lord.

**I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water…**: Israel justified her behaviour as she was benefiting from her sin – the economic and political sides of the country were thriving (albeit it is certain that not everyone benefitted). There was no recognition that this sin is merely a passing pleasure (**Hebrews 11:25**).

**Hosea 2:6-8 God wants to draw Israel back**

**6Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. 7She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, “I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.” 8She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold – which they used for Baal.**

**…I will block her path with thornbushes**: Eventually, the economic and political parts of the life of the country will stagnate. Some versions have hedges of thorns at the side – either way, God will restrict the ability of the country to go along its own chosen path any more – it will be God’s way or nothing. These restrictions were designed to drive Israel into repentance.

The aim is for Israel to say, **I will go back to my husband…**: Israel should have seen the folly in leaving God’s fellowship and the lack of long-term benefits in leaving. Any temptation that we have in our walk with the LORD to go after idols (no matter how attractive they seem), will appear pointless when God shows us, or reminds us, what we are losing. We must **go back to** our **husband**, the LORD.

**She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain…**: Even when Israel went after other gods, the Lord still provided for her. This showed His great, unselfish love to Israel. Even though Israel took what God provided and **prepared** it **for Baal**, He still loved them.

**…which they used for Baal**: We must remember that anything we have comes from God, so giving it to an idol – **Baal** – is an offence to God.

‘God gives to man the trees of the forest and the iron in the ground. He gives man the brains to make an axe and nails from the iron, and the energy to cut down the tree, the skill to fashion the wood into beams. God gives man the cleverness to make a handle from the wood, and head from the iron, and combine it into an effective hammer. Then man takes the beams, the nails and the hammer and he nails God to the cross - where God willingly stretched out His arms, dying on the cross to take the guilt and penalty man's sin deserved - and to make a new, restored relationship between God and man possible.’ (Guzik)

**Hosea 2:9-13 How God will punish Israel.**

**9‘Therefore I will take away my corn when it ripens and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her naked body. 10So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. 11I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days – all her appointed festivals. 12I will ruin her vines and her fig-trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers;
I will make them a thicket and wild animals will devour them. 13I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewellery, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot,’ declares the Lord.**

**I will take away My corn…**: God says that the crops and food that comes from the land is actually His provision and it is His to continue or stop. Here He says He will stop that supply, which in turn will stop the appointed feasts and celebrations – **yearly festivals, New Moons, Sabbaths**, which have become pointless as they are no longer God-centred. As the supply of wine and food is cut, the areas that were previously cultivated will reduce in production, to be taken over by thickets which will in turn attract wild animals.

This will be done because Israel has gone after foreign gods, whilst forgetting the Lord.

In terms of Hosea’s ministry, this is a future event - at the time Israel enjoyed great prosperity, but the wealth was being used to further worship idols, rather than God. In the future Israel’s prosperity will be taken away.

**Hosea 2:14-15 Abundance and joy restored.**

**14‘Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. 15There I will give her back her vineyards and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.**

**…I am going to allure her …speak tenderly to her**: Once Israel has been the subject of God’s judgement, the people will return to Him – they will listen to the voice of God once again and He will **allure** her back to Himself.

‘This is a singular kind of power: 'I will allure her;' not, 'I will drive her' not even, 'I will draw her,' or, 'I will drag her;' or, 'I will force her.' No, 'I will allure her.' It is a very remarkable word, and it teaches us that the allurement of love surpasses in power all other forces. The devil ruins us by tempting us with honeyed words, sweet utterances, with the baits of pleasure and the like; but the Lord in mercy determines that, in all truthfulness, He will outbid the devil and He will win us to himself by fascinations, enticements and allurements which shall be stronger than any force of resistance we may offer. This is a wonderfully precious word: 'I will allure her.’’ (Spurgeon)

**…the Valley of Achor a door of hope**: **Achor** means ‘trouble’. It was a place where Achan's sin was discovered and judged (**Joshua 7:26**), but God’s grace has the ability to transform trouble into **a door of hope**.

…**she will respond as in the days of her youth…**: ‘Respond’ in some versions is translated as ‘sing’. In Israel’s restoration, joy will return and singing will be a result of that joy. The singing on this occasion will be for joy and praise, rather than out of revelry.

**Hosea 2:16-20 Restored relationship**

**16‘In that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘you will call me “my husband”; you will no longer call me “my master”. 17I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. 18In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. 19I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you inrighteousness and justice, in love and compassion. 20I will betroth you infaithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord.**

**…you will call Me "My Husband"**: The promised covenant with Jesus and the church is described in terms of a marriage and this genuine and permanent relationship is what God wants with His people.

**…you will no longer call Me "My Master"**: God does not want a relationship based on fear or obligation, He wants a relationship built on love and partnership.

**I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips**: The origin of ‘Baal’ in Hebrew is from the word meaning ‘master. The Baals, which were the idols of the surrounding nations, had a ‘master/slave’ relationship with man - but God does not want to build His relationship with His people on that basis.

**Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land…**: This transformed relationship will transform the surroundings too – including politics and the ecology (**…beasts of the field …birds in the sky**). This will certainly be fulfilled within the Millennial Kingdom, but we can know God’s new relationship right now, along with its transforming power for lives, by accepting Jesus as Saviour.

**I will betroth you to Me forever**: When restored, this relationship will never again be broken. One of the results will be that we **will acknowledge the LORD**.

**Hosea 2:21-23 Restored blessing**

**21‘In that day I will respond,’ declares the Lord – ‘I will respond to the skies and they will respond to the earth; 22and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil and they will respond to Jezreel. 23I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called “Not my loved one”.I will say to those called “Not my people”, “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.”’**

**…I will respond…**: A perfect restoration with God will enable us to be within His will at all times, which will impact on our prayers and requests. As the likes of Moses could have a conversation with God, so He **will respond** each time with His provision **…the earth will respond to the grain, with new wine and the olive oil**: This close relationship reflects Jesus’ teaching:

* **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you (John 15:7).**
* **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).**

**‘Jezreel’** means ‘scattered’, which can be negative (**1:4-5**), but here it is used in a positive way - in terms of scattering seed as part of the sowing process. Although the nation will have been previously scattered, it will be restored with growth – transformed by sowing.

**I will show my love to the one I called “Not my loved one”.I will say to those called “Not my people”, “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.”’** The names of Hosea’s children are given - Lo-Ruhamah, meaning ‘No Mercy’ (**1:6**) and Lo-Ammi, meaning ‘Not My People’ (**1:9**) – out of judgement will come restoration and in that, a full return to God.

‘Which one of the pagan gods of the nations ever wanted the love of their followers? Which of them ever asked, "Do you love me?" False gods don't want our love, they want our fear, our obedience, our slave-like sacrifice and devotion. But the true God, the living God, isn't satisfied with just our fear, our obedience, or even with our slave-like sacrifice and devotion. He wants our love, freely given and enjoyed in relationship with Him. If we miss this, we miss the heart of God's work in us and for us.’ (Guzik)

**Hosea 3:1 God commands Hosea to love Gomer again.**

**3 The Lord said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’**

**Go, show your love to you wife again…**: God directs Hosea to go back to his wife, even though she is **committing adultery**. Although this may have been a distasteful thought to Hosea, it is a command from God.

**Deuteronomy 24:1** and **Matthew 19:7-8** permit divorce when adultery comes into a marriage, but it is not a command. If God commanded divorce in the case of adultery, then He would go against His own Word on this occasion and that cannot happen.

**Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites**: God commanded Hosea to go back to his still-unfaithful wife, partly for the sake of Hosea and his wife Gomer, but also that his action would be an example and lesson of the LORD's relationship with His people. Despite spiritual adultery, God still loved His people.

**Hosea 3:2-3 Hosea restores Gomer through his purchase.**

**2So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. 3Then I told her, ‘You are to live with me for many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.’**

**So I bought her…**: Whoever Gomer was with, she was still his wife, so there was no expectation that he should have to purchase her back. This however, is a display of love and commitment, even though it may be thought of as being beyond what is reasonable. Hosea is saying to Gomer, ‘You don't need the others. I can supply you everything you need’.

**You are to live with me for many days**: This statement is meant as being a full restoration of Hosea and Gomer’s relationship, including Gomer turning her back on prostitution. The point of **many days** relates to permanence, rather than just a finite period of time.

**Hosea 3:4-5 Fallen and restored Israel**

**4For the Israelites will live for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. 5Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.**

**…without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones…**: Despite appearances, in her current, fallen state, Israel does not have either the political or spiritual leadership she needs, but God can restore those things. **…without ephod or teraphim** is a warning that the people will lose their ability to turn to any other supernatural guidance to direct them. God should and will be the sole focus of the people’s worship – He will accept no other.

**…the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God…**: One of the results of the people returning to the Lord will be the political and spiritual restoration of the country, however repentance must come before restoration with the Lord, not the other way round.

**…and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to His blessings in the last days**: Although many Jews have accepted Jesus as Messiah, this will come to ultimate fulfilment within the Millennial kingdom, where a resurrected David will reign over Israel (**Isaiah 55:3-5, Jeremiah 30:9, Ezekiel 34:23-25**).

When this message was given originally to Israel, any individual that turned back to God at that time would have been immediately blessed by God, receiving the restored relationship that Hosea spoke about. The same is true today as it was in Hosea’s day – with both Jew and Gentile having the right to approach God.

**Hosea 4:1-8 Israel's sin and God's remedy.**

**Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.
2There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. 3Because of this the land dries up and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away. 4‘But let no one bring a charge, let no one accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. 5You stumble day and night and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother – 6my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. ‘Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children. 7The more priests there were, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their glorious God for something disgraceful. 8They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.**

**…the Lord has a charge to bring against you**: This is literally a charge similar to that which would be read out in court - God is the plaintiff (the wronged party), whilst Israel is the defendant (the accused or guilty party).

**There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land**: These three accusations are connected – as people cease acknowledging God (some translations have lack of knowledge of God), so faithfulness and love (truth and mercy), have gone. The text implies that faithfulness is something more than personal opinion, whilst love should extend beyond self-interest.

**Proverbs 9:10** says **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

Spurgeon said, ‘…the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.’

**…they break all bounds and bloodshed leads to bloodshed…**: God has already said the result of leaving His fellowship is **cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery** – all of God’s boundaries for living healthy and spiritual lives are being broken. Some translations indicate the people lacked any restraint – a phenomenon that is seemingly as prevalent today as it was then.

‘The ultimate result is **bloodshed after bloodshed**. In the Hebrew, this is literally ‘bloody deed touches bloody deed.’ Violent crimes had become so common that one followed immediately after another, as if touching it.’ (Wood)

**...all who live in it waste away**: The result of abandoning the knowledge of God is that whilst we are convinced we are gaining freedom, the opposite is true – we are actually on a path to destruction.

‘Paul may have had Hosea in mind as he wrote his own indictment of the gentile nations’ (Boice)

* **Hosea 4:6 / Romans 1:24, 26, 28 - 24Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 26Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 28Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.**
* **Hosea 4:7 / Romans 1:23 23and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.**
* **Hosea 4:11 / Romans 1:21-22****21For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools**

**…your people are like those who bring charges against a priest**: The priests were supposed to be true leaders to the people, following God’s ways. **Deuteronomy 17:9-12** commands the people to listen to and submit to the priests. But the people now argue with God’s authority.

* **Go to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office at that time. Enquire of them and they will give you the verdict. You must act according to the decisions they give you at the place the Lord will choose. Be careful to do everything they instruct you to do. Act according to whatever they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left. Anyone who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the Lord your God is to be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel. Deuteronomy 17:9-12**

**and the prophets stumble with you**: The situation has got so bad that even the **prophets** have been brought down to the level of the people – the implication is that no one is immune.

**…my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge**: It is not a lack of love or strength on God’s part that results in the people being destroyed, it is due to the people’s **lack of knowledge**.

The text implies the people are not completely ignorant – they do have some **knowledge**, but it is not enough. There is a thought that they have just enough to consider that they know it all.

‘There is a clear connection between knowing God and knowing His Word. Some people think that Bible knowledge is boring and brainy and not necessary for a real walk with God. But God and His Word are vitally connected. **Psalm 138:2** (NKJV) says, **You have exalted above all things
Your name and Your Word**. When God chose a term to express His nature with the Psalmist, He calls Himself ‘The Word’ (**John 1:1**).’’ (Guzik)

The knowledge of who God really is, will affect our conduct. ‘Where there is no knowledge of God, no conviction of his omnipresence and omniscience, private offences, such as stealing, adulteries and so forth, will prevail.’ (Clarke)

**…I also reject you as My priests**: The entire nation of Israel was supposed to be a nation of priests (**Exodus 19:6**), so it is in fact the entire community that is responsible for this charge being laid, not just the anointed priests.

**…the more they sinned against Me**: God's blessing of the priests had been taken for granted and sin had increased. In most cases, a blessing from God requires a level of extra accountability, but at the same time, with it can come pride and the opportunity for sin.

**They feed on the sins of My people**: God’s laws as given to Moses required offerings to be made when sins were atoned for. The priests were permitted to take a part of some of those offerings, to keep their own families, but that did not extend to all offerings. ‘The priests were enjoying the benefits of the people's sins, such as taking bribes and eating the sin offerings. So, the priests actually relished and profited from Israel's wickedness.’ (Wood)

‘There is no doubt that the priesthood of Israel was corrupt. Jeroboam I had made priests 'from all sorts of people'.

* **Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites 1 Kings 12:31**
* **Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places. 1 Kings 13:33**

Large numbers of true priests - and doubtless true prophets, also - had left the northern kingdom.’ (Wood)

* **The priests and Levites from all their districts throughout Israel sided with him. The Levites even abandoned their pasture-lands and property and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the Lord when he appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made. Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. 2 Chronicles 11:13-16**

**Hosea 4:9-14 The promised judgement**

**9And it will be: like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. 10‘They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not flourish, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves 11to prostitution; old wine and new wine take away their understanding. 12My people consult a wooden idol and a diviner’s rod speaks to them. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. 13They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore, your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. 14‘I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine-prostitutes – a people without understanding will come to ruin!**

**…like people, like priests**: Everyone will be subject to the coming judgment, not just the people. ‘Another interpretation… the way the people go, the priests follow. Religious leaders cannot be holy on behalf of the people - as priests come from backslidden people, it will reflect in the priests.’ (Guzik)

**They will eat but not have enough…**: God’s judgment will stop the blessing of increase to Israel. What they do have will never seem **enough** and they will never be satisfied.

**…they are unfaithful to their God**: Israel's idolatry was like adultery against the LORD. Every sacrifice made to a pagan god could be likened to an act of adultery. ‘The picture is striking when we consider what a faithful and good husband the LORD is to His people. Adultery is never excusable, but is even more heinous against a good, faithful, loving spouse.’ (Guzik)

**…the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine-prostitutes**: Hosea is describing Israel’s actions as spiritual adultery. The worship practice for many pagan gods involved hiring a shrine-prostitute **1 Kings 14:24, 15:12**. This ‘was far more enticing than just praying to a statue.’ (Guzik) and was not a new phenomenon **Genesis 38:21-22** and with time, even appear to have got into God’s temple in Jerusalem **2 Kings 23:7**, but God’s laws forbade any Israelite from becoming a shrine-prostitute **Deuteronomy 23:17**, as do His laws talk about worshipping other Gods.

**I will not punish your daughters…**: Because the men of Israel sinned this way, God would not single the women of Israel out for judgment when it came to this sin – God has no double standards.

**…a people without understanding will come to ruin**: Hosea repeats his warning from **4:6** - without understanding God and His word, God's people (and everyone else), are destined for destruction.

**Hosea 4:15 Judah is warned not to follow Israel's sinful ways.**

**‘Though you, Israel, commit adultery, do not let Judah become guilty. ‘Do not go to Gilgal; do not go up to Beth Aven.And do not swear, “As surely as the Lord lives!”**

**…do not let Judah become guilty**: Although Israel's apostasy was far more severe at this time, Judah is warned not to follow her neighbour's sinful ways.

**Do not go to Gilgal**: **Gilgal** and **Bethel** were centres of idolatry in Israel and for the people of Judah to travel there meant they shared in Israel's idolatry. Becoming too close to sinful practices leave us in danger of them leaving their mark - **Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character**’ **1 Corinthians 15:33**. Beth Aven means house of wickedness (a derogatory name for Bethel).

**Gilgal** was once a place where prophets were trained under Elijah and Elisha **2 Kings 2:1, 4:38**, but by Hosea's time it had become a centre for false worship **Hosea 9:15, 12:11, Amos 4:4, 5:5**.

**Hosea 4:16-19 Israel's sin**

**16The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the Lord pasture them like lambs in a meadow? 17Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! 18Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. 19A whirlwind will sweep them away and their sacrifices will bring them shame.**

**The Israelites are stubborn, lambs a stubborn heifer…**: Cattle grazed more freely than sheep – as they were less vulnerable to predators. However, that freedom came at a cost, especially if they used that freedom to act in a stubborn way (by wandering off from God) - the people would lose God’s spiritual protection (the protection of the shepherd / herdsman).

**Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!**: As the largest tribe that made up the population of Israel, the term **Ephraim** is often used by the prophets as another way of referring to Israel. When the invaders come, God will leave Ephraim alone – they will have to fight for themselves.

This is a reminder that we all need God’s protection. Even with Jesus close by (maybe because of it), Satan wanted to sift Peter, **Luke 22:31-32**, but Jesus did not abandon Peter, who was victorious through Jesus’ prayers and by remaining close to His Saviour.

**Hosea 5:1-9 The leaders are rebuked for the sinful state of the nation.**

**‘Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, royal house! This judgment is against you: you have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. 2The rebels are knee-deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them. 3I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. 4‘Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord. 5Israel’s arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them. 6When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them. 7They are unfaithful to the Lord; they give birth to illegitimate children. When they celebrate their New Moon feasts, he will devour their fields.8‘Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven; lead on, Benjamin.9Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain.**

**Hear this, you priests…**: Blame for the threat of judgement has so far been laid against both the people and the priesthood, but this verse suggests God is saying the true fault lies with the spiritual leaders (**priests**) and political leadership (**royal house**).

**The rebels are knee-deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them**: Discipline is meant as a method of correction for wrongdoing and bringing the wrong doer back into line – all of Israel’s actions are known to the Lord, as are all of our actions. We may be sinners, but God will always work to restore a repentant person.

**Israel’s arrogance testifies against them…**: But, in Israel’s case, they do not want to repent. In their pride they say that what God said didn't really matter, when compared to their own opinions and desires.

**When they go… to seek the LORD, but will not find Him**: It is possible that Israel had made some gestures of repentance in response to God’s warnings (we do not know), but if that was the case, they were superficial, as the idols seemed to be of greater importance **4:17**. God says, those approaches **will not find Him**. Their repentance was not enough as they did **not acknowledge the Lord**. We also need to be careful as we worship and seek the Lord, to ensure our response and actions are more than superficial.

**…he has withdrawn Himself from them**: It is possible to be so engrossed in ways of rebellion towards God, that He leaves us to ourselves **Romans 1:24, 26, 28**. At first, we may not notice, but there comes a time when we call upon the LORD and we **will not find Him**. Only then do we see the distance that has developed.

**Ephraim will be laid waste on the day reckoning**: The result of God’s absence in anyone’s life means there is no Heavenly ally on the day that real help is required – in the Israelite’s case, this would be a day of invasion. The land will be made **desolate** and by all accounts it was.

**Hosea 5:10-13 Israel and Judah look to man's wisdom.**

**10Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water. 11Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols.
12I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah. 13‘When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores.**

**Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones**: Judah is no better than Israel. The text implies the political leaders of Judah were also corrupt and cheating, including changing boundaries (physical or otherwise) if they thought it would be advantageous. **Deuteronomy 19:14** commands against this, whilst **27:17** attaches a curse to anyone who does it.

‘Judah's leaders were not shifting physical property lines but spiritual lines established by God, changing the boundary between right and wrong, between true and false religion, between the true God and the idols.’ (Wood)

God reminds Judah that she has her own sin to deal with – they still had to repent.

**…Ephraim turned to Assyria**: Israel chose to trust in man rather than God and paid the price by being conquered by Assyria. Some versions (KJV/NKJV/ESV) mention **King Jareb**. ‘Jareb is not an Assyrian name but means 'warrior'. (Wood)

Trusting in anything rather than the LORD is always foolish and will ends in ruin. …l**ike a moth …like rot**: God will eventually destroy the little that Israel and Judah do have. They will not be blessed, nor will they prosper.

**Hosea 5:14-15 God's objective in His judgment**

**14For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. 15Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face – in their misery they will earnestly seek me.’**

**…I will be like a lion…**: God's judgment can be slow and subtle (**…like a moth …like rot**), or it can be obvious (**…like a lion**) – either way, God will work His purposes - the **moth** and **lion** both destroy, but in different ways.

**…in their misery they will earnestly seek Me**: God’s objective in His judgment, was to restore, not destroy. Human nature, as it is, often requires us to get to the point of **misery** (KJV/NKJV/ESV - affliction) before we **seek** the LORD.

**Hosea 6:1-2 A call to return to the Lord**

**‘Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. 2After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence.**

**…He has torn us… but He will heal us**: Hosea calls for the people to return to God. He acknowledges that the Lord is behind the correction that the people and country needs, but it is done out of love for them, however, whilst rebellion remains along with a lack of submission, they can't receive God’s love in a meaningful way.

**After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us…**: Hosea’s prayer is full of confidence that God is able to restore. Whether Hosea is prophesying in terms of the Messiah is not clear (as reference is made to **two days**), but the context supports Jesus death on the cross – being **torn** for our sake, yet being raised up **on the third day**.

A further interpretation is that two days is linked to a day being as a thousand years to the Lord **Psalm 90:4**.

**Hosea 6:3 Confidence after turning back to God**

**3Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear; He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.’**

**Let us acknowledge the LORD**: Some translations have **pursue the knowledge of the Lord**. Hosea returns to his remarks from **4:6** **my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.** Hosea rightfully points out the solution to this problem – it lies in repentance. But from that repentance, God promises to reveal Himself – He will bless those who pursue Him, but our search must include both pursuit and belief, rather than anything superficial. …**without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him Hebrews 11:6.**

**…He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains…**: Israel had little in the way of water reserves, so the rains (early and latter) were greatly anticipated. If the rains failed, the harvest would probably be greatly reduced, or even lost. God will not open Himself up to us if we do not pursue Him in the right way and our harvest (our blessings and salvation) can be lost.

Some commentators believe that Hosea refers to both of the seasonal rains, rather than just a singular rain, because God’s grace is ongoing and does not stop after one outpouring.

**Hosea 6:4-6 How God's people missed God's heart.**

**4‘What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. 5Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth – then my judgments go forth like the sun. 6For I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.**

**Your love is like the morning mist…**: Some versions have **faithfulness**, instead of **love**. Either way, it is describing something that is only present for a short period, before evaporating away - **like the early dew**.

**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice…**: The people were continuing in their practice of presenting sacrifices (**5:6** indicates they were certainly going through the right motions), but there was no real repentance or mercy associated with those acts. Hosea links the lack of **mercy** with the abandoning of the knowledge of God, His ways and truth **4:1**.

Jesus quoted this passage twice – **Matthew 9:13, 12:7** – both times to the religious leaders of His day, who were also missing the heart of God, as they chose to focus on superficial things. Israel brought animals for sacrifice, but never themselves as a living sacrifice as required by **Romans 12:1**. As a result they missed the opportunity to have a deep and close relationship with God.

**6:5** could be translated as shaping or judging, meaning the words of God’s prophets will be His judgement on the people and country, as they shape the people to what God wants them to be.

**Hosea 6:7-11 Idolatry of the people**

**7As at Adam, they have broken the covenant; they were unfaithful to Me there. 8Gilead is a city of evildoers, stained with footprints of blood. 9As marauders lie in ambush for a victim, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, carrying out their wicked schemes.
10I have seen a horrible thing in Israel: there Ephraim is given to prostitution, Israel is defiled.**

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

**As marauders lie in ambush for a victim, so do bands of priests…**: Hosea is saying that the practice of offering sacrifices anywhere other than the place appointed by God (**Deuteronomy 12:5** - which by the time of Hosea was Jerusalem), was the equivalent of murder – it was a pagan occurrence and should be stopped.

**Hosea 6:11 – 7:3 The sinful ignorance and wilful blindness of Israel.**

**11‘Also for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed. ‘Whenever I would restore the fortunes of My people, 1whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed. They practise deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets; 2but they do not realise that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before Me. 3‘They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies.**

**…Judah, a harvest is appointed. ‘Whenever I would restore the fortunes of My people**: This verse is targeted towards Judah, who unlike Israel, would be restored following their exile.

**…they do not realise that I remember all their evil deeds**: The people and leaders appear to be forgetting, either on purpose, or because they are so used to sinning, that the LORD both saw and remembered all their actions and therefore, their sin. Some things may be secret before men, but not before God - He says, **’they are always before Me**.’

Although God remembers, there is a promise for those who come to God under His grace in the New Covenant: …**I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more Jeremiah 31:34** – that being through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus’ death.

**…whenever I would heal Israel… the sins are exposed…**: God was willing to heal Israel from their sin and its effects, but this required them to see their sin and not act as if God did not see it.

**They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies**: This may relate to the problem being so embedded in the country’s life and culture that even the hierarchy were involved – which is likely as all the kings of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), are described Biblically as ‘bad’.

Hosea 7:4-7 Israel would rather chase after idols.

**4They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises. 5On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine and he joins hands with the mockers. 6Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smoulders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. 7All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall and none of them calls on me.**

**…like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir…**: Israel passionately (hot) followed idols rather than God – the analogy is the oven heat (the passion) is hot enough to do the cooking. Yet, **none of them calls on Me**: Israel could not chase after idols, whilst expecting to also call on God.

**Hosea 7:8-10 The pride and stubbornness of Israel.**

**8‘Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat loaf not turned over. 9Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realise it. His hair is sprinkled with grey, but he does not notice.
10Israel’s arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the Lord his God or search for him.**

**Ephraim is a flat loaf unturned**: The idea is of a ‘half-baked’ cake. Bread in Hosea’s time was prepared and cooked on both sides, similar to a pancake. Hosea’s analogy is that it is impossible to serve both God and idols – only one can be done – only one side can be cooked.

**Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realise it**: The truth of Israel’s situation is the country is slowly losing strength (spiritual and soon to be economic and political), because of external influences of idol worship being introduced by the people. Although the people should see the state of the nation, they cannot because they are so blinded by years of failing to follow God.

‘Man has an amazing ability to deceive himself when he is in sin. Well did Jeremiah say, **The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9**.’ (Guzik)

‘It was said of Samson after Deliliah cut his hair: **But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Judges 16:20**. This is where the people of Israel - and some followers of God today - were. They are far from God and already suffering the effects, but they can't see it.’ (Guzik)

**His hair is sprinkled with grey, but he does not notice**: Israel has begun to decline and decay, but its actions are to the contrary – it acts as if still a young person with energy, but lacking wisdom.

**Hosea 7:11-12 Israel flies about to the nations.**

**11‘Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless – now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. 12When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like the birds in the sky. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.**

**Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless**: Hosea compares the country to a bird that is fluttering about, lacking any real direction. Their thoughts are to run for help to other nations and to form political alliances, but God will eventually catch up with them - **I will throw my net over them… I will catch them.**

**When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them:** The ESV translates this verse as **I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation**, which is probably easier to interpret. Israel's guilt is increased **according to the report** they have heard. Despite the split with the Southern Kingdom, the nation of Israel still has the knowledge of God available from the Scriptures. Having greater knowledge should result in having greater accountability, so with possession of God’s word, they should be better people. …f**rom everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48**

**Hosea 7:13-16 In running to the nations, Israel has run *away* from God.**

**13Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak about me falsely. 14They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail on their beds. They slash themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from me. 15I trained them and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against me. 16They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.**

**They do not turn to the Most High**: Israel may have seen the problem, but do not acknowledge that their sin is the cause. So, Hosea says, when problems arose, rather than calling upon the Lord, the people **wail on their beds**. They sought solutions to their problems from human sources, rather than from **the Most High**.

**…they are like a faulty bow**: A bow that is faulty in any way, is not going to shoot an arrow straight and will miss the target (the Hebrew phrase used in archery ‘to miss the target’, is the same word used to describe sin). A faulty bow is a useless and dangerous weapon – as is having a defective faith, when you think you have a foundation with the Lord.

**Hosea 8:1-6 The results of idolatry**

**‘Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the Lord because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law. 2Israel cries out to me, “Our God, we acknowledge you!” 3But Israel has rejected what is good; an enemy will pursue him. 4They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction. 5Throw out your calf-idol, Samaria! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? 6They are from Israel! This calf – a metalworker has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria.**

**Put the trumpet to your lips…** Trumpets were used to assemble God's people and assemble the troops for battle. Here, God commands the **trumpet** to gather the Assyrians against Israel for judgment, **because the people have broken My covenant**.

**Israel cries out to Me…** But God knows their cry is not sincere, as **Israel has rejected what is good** - Jesus gave a similar message to the people of His time (and us) in **Matthew 7:22**.

**They set up kings without My consent**: "To choose leaders without the direction of God is not only sinful, it is foolish. Those who follow their own wisdom in the choice of leaders inevitably get what they deserve." (Boice)

**Throw out your calf-idol… it will be broken to pieces…**: Israel had made beautiful idols out of silver and gold, but they would not stand up in the judgment - God will break them **to pieces**.

**This calf… it is not God…**: literally 'your calf stinks.'" (Wood) That's what God thought of their idols.

**Hosea 8:7-10 Israel judged and regathered.**

**7‘They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour.
Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up. 8Israel is swallowed up; now she is among the nations like something no one wants. 9For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers. 10Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king. 11‘Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning. 12I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign. 13Though they offer sacrifices as gifts to me and though they eat the meat, the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: they will return to Egypt. 14Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; Judah has fortified many towns. But I will send fire on their cities that will consume their fortresses.’**

**They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind**: Israel will feel the coming judgement is worse than the sin they committed. God is not being punitive in dealing with sin, rather it is our human perception of how judgment feels. ‘It may be because our sin is sown over a long period of time, but often reaped in a short period of judgment.’ (Guzik) Alternatively, it is because we don’t like being disciplined.

**…now she is among the nations… I will gather them together…**: God promised that Israel would face the conquering Assyrians and exile, but also that He would one day **gather them** again. This note of mercy is sprinkled through the song warning of judgment.

**Hosea 8:11-13 Israel considers God's word a strange thing.**

**11‘Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning.
12I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign.
13Though they offer sacrifices as gifts to me and though they eat the meat, the Lord is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: they will return to Egypt.**

**…these have become altars for sinning**: Israel’s altars were not authorised by God, therefore, they could only be used **for sinning**.

**I wrote for them the many things of My law, but they considered them as something foreign**: As part of their sin and idolatry, Israel has rejected the Word of God, which should have set them apart. ‘If this be the Word of God, what will become of some of you who have not read it for the last month? Most people treat the Bible very politely... When they get home, they lay it up in a drawer till next Sunday morning; then it comes out again for a little bit of a treat and goes to chapel; that is all the poor Bible gets in the way of an airing. That is your style of entertaining this heavenly messenger. There is dust enough on some of your Bibles to write "damnation" with your fingers.’ (Spurgeon)

**…the many things of My law**: Spurgeon said about the content of the Bible, ‘The Bible treats of great things and of great things only. There is nothing in this Bible which is unimportant. Every verse in it has a solemn meaning, and if we have not found it out yet, we hope yet to do it.’ (Spurgeon)

**…but they regarded them as something foreign**: This is the same way as God’s Word has been received by most men since the beginning. Paul expressed the same idea in **1 Corinthians 2:14**. The Word of God and the things of the spirit are **great**, but seem **strange** by sinful man.

**Hosea 8:14 There is no refuge from God if we forget Him**

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

**Israel has forgotten his Maker…**: Israel has built palaces, rather than building a true relationship. **Judah has fortified many towns**: While Israel practiced outright idolatry, Judah was guilty of a more subtle sin. They trusted in the **fortified towns** they built against the Assyrians. Those **cities** would be of no help (**I will send fire on their cities**) and only the LORD would ultimately preserve Judah from total destruction **Isaiah 37:33-36**.

‘Perhaps we can capture some of the ungodly heart of Israel and Judah by examining our own attraction to bigness and nice facilities. What could be wrong with success and nice buildings? They easily become idols if your heart turns from God. If God brings size and great buildings, it is wonderful - as long as we don't turn our eyes of Him, making those things idols.’ (Guzik)

## Hosea 9:1-4 The end of the good life in Israel.

**Do not rejoice, Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing-floor. 2Threshing-floors and winepresses will not feed the people; the new wine will fail them. 3They will not remain in the Lord’s land; Ephraim will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria. 4They will not pour out wine offerings to the Lord, nor will their sacrifices please him. Such sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat them will be unclean. This food will be for themselves; it will not come into the temple of the Lord.**

**Do not rejoice, Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations**: ‘…we do not know this for sure, but Hosea may have delivered the opening part of this oracle as a sermon on the occasion of a harvest festival… characterised by feasting, mirth and dancing." (Boice)

The text indicates that Hosea brought this prophecy when things appeared prosperous in Israel, yet he warns the people not to **rejoice like other nations**, because judgment was on the way.

**… you have been unfaithful to your God… Threshing-floors and winepresses will not feed the people…** The worship of other gods was taking place on the threshing floor, as the people believed that would help with the harvest, but through that action, God would actually curse their harvest.

**They will not remain in the Lord's land…**: Although the Lord had given the land to the Israelites, it remained His land – their unfaithfulness would result in the people losing their homes as well as the protection of the Lord.

**Ephraim will return to Egypt… food will be for themselves…**: The people would be dispersed into exile in foreign lands, where any bread they could get would be used to survive, rather than for sacrifice.

**Hosea 9:5-9 The days of Israel's punishment in Egypt.**

**5What will you do on the day of your appointed festivals, on the feast days of the Lord? 6Even if they escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them and Memphis will bury them. Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briers and thorns will overrun their tents. 7The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired person a maniac. 8The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim,yet snares await him on all his paths and hostility in the house of his God. 9They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.**

**What will you do on the day of your appointed festivals…**: God is going to remove the appointed festivals, as they are not being used to honour Him. These were days that God had Himself put aside for His people to specifically come before Him to worship Him – not all of them were overtly days of celebration, some were specifically times to reflect and meditate on God’s blessings to Israel, but all were meant to be used to glorify God, not the idols.

…t**he prophet is considered a fool…**: The people are saying, …’Who in his right mind would prophesy a judgment like this when we are in the midst of such a bountiful harvest, which in itself is a proof of God's blessing?’ (Boice)

…**as in the days of Gibeah**: **Gibeah** had several claims to fame –

* First mentioned when the land was divided between the tribes – it is given to Benjamin.
* **Judges 19 & 20**, relates crimes of perversion and violence and the subsequent judgement on the Benjamite people.
* It is the home town of Saul (the first king of Israel).

Hosea uses Gibeah to describe Israel - to say the morals of the country have dropped to those of Gibeah during the time of the Judges.

**Hosea 9:10-14 Judgement will include barrenness and bereavement.**

**10‘When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig-tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. 11Ephraim’s glory will fly away like a bird – no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. 12Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them of everyone. Woe to them when I turn away from them! 13I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim will bring out their children to the slayer.’ 14Give them, Lord – what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry.**

**…like …grapes in the desert**: God remembers the days when Israel was faithful and fruitful to Him. The grapes and first fruits as mentioned here, would have been an unexpected blessing to the person finding them. ‘While they were faithful, they were as acceptable to me as ripe grapes would be to a thirsty traveller in the desert." (Clarke) God is saying His people used to be a delight to Him.

**…they came to Baal Peor**: Hosea again Israel's history to liken the current spiritual state of the country – **Numbers 25** describes **Baal Peor** as a place where Israel was sinful in the days Moses.

…**they …became as vile as the ting they loved**: As Israel worshipped the idols, they became like them – but they should have been becoming more like God, by serving Him.

…**no birth, no pregnancy, no conception**: In contrast to past blessings, Israel will now experience barrenness and bereavement - **I will bereave them of everyone**.

**Give them, LORD - what will You give?** The thought by commentators is that Hosea initially started a prayer to God that was full of anger against the people (**Give them, LORD)**. He then stopped, not knowing what to pray for (**what will you give?**"). In the end, he asked for **wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry**. In what appears a harsh prayer, Hosea may have been praying in a merciful way – Hosea knows the Lord’s judgement is imminent, so he asks the Lord for fewer children and therefore, fewer people to ultimately face the coming exile.

‘Sometimes those who see themselves - perhaps accurately - as more spiritual and closer to God than others in a church or group get angry and frustrated with those who don't seem to have hearts burning for the LORD. Their frustration is understandable but the pause in Hosea's prayer should give them pause. It is a good thing to long for revival and spiritual passion among God's people, but if that makes us proud, angry, or bitter against others then Satan has won a great victory.’ (Guzik)

**Hosea 9:15-17 God will not support the people**

**15‘Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of My house. I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious. 16Ephraim is blighted, their root is withered, they yield no fruit. Even if they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring.’ 17My God will reject them because they have not obeyed Him; they will be wanderers among the nations.**

**…all their wickedness in Gilgal…**: 4:15 speaks of God’s dislike of **Gilgal** – being a centre of idolatry in Israel – previously a training place for prophets **2 Kings 2:1, 4:38**.

**I will drive them out of My house**: Exile is a fitting punishment for Israel – they had been wicked in both God’s land and **His house**, so the people would be driven (evicted) from both.

**…they yield no fruit …I will slay their cherished offspring**: Some of the idols, such as Ashtoreth, were supposed to bring fertility and fruitfulness, but God reminds Israel that He is really the Lord that is over everything, including birth (**Genesis 11:30, 1 Samuel 2:5**) – so He is able to turn their previous fruitfulness into barrenness.

**My God will reject them, because they have not obeyed Him**: This is the curse that was promised under the terms of the Old Covenant **Deuteronomy 29:4-8**. Thankfully, we can come to God by faith in a new covenant, where He promises to remember our sins no more **Hebrews 8:12, 10:16-17**.

**Hosea 10:1-2 Israel's empty vine.**

**Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself. As his fruit increased, he built more altars; as his land prospered, he adorned his sacred stones. 2Their heart is deceitful and now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will demolish their altars and destroy their sacred stones.**

**…he brought forth fruit for himself. As His fruit increased, he built more altars…**: As God blessed Israel with material abundance, they were spending it on themselves and their own desires (including by worshipping idols) – they enjoyed and used God’s blessings against Him.

**Galatians 5:13** warns NT readers against of the same thing – **You my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather, serve one another humbly in love**. We are warned not to abuse the freedom that God gives through Jesus by pursuing ungodly ways. Rather we should focus on Him only.

**Their heart is deceitful and now they must bear their guilt**: A previously point is brought again – that those who have been blessed more, have a greater responsibility to use the blessing (riches, gifts, etc.) wisely and to ensure God is honoured in their use. But Israel has not used the blessings wisely, so **The Lord will demolish their altars…**

**Their heart is deceitful**: some translations use the word **‘divided’** (KJV/NKJV/ESV**.** The original Hebrew – *halaq* – allows several translations to be possible and correct:

* **divided** – **Genesis 14:15, 49:7** – literally to make a division, or split into groups.
* **smooth** – **Genesis 27:11, Psalm 55:21** – a smooth surface.
* **flattering – Genesis 36:2** – in terms of speech.

It is accurate to translate this phrase as **their heart is deceitful** or **divided**, but it is also right to imply that God wants to say that Ephraim has a heart that is ‘flattering’ and therefore insincere.

‘The idea of Israel's "smooth" or "insincere" heart is reflected by the adulteries of Hosea's wife Gomer earlier in the book. In the same way that an unfaithful spouse will say they love their partner, all the while living a lie, is the same way Israel's heart was towards God.’ (Guzik)

**The Lord will demolish their altars and their sacred stones**: ‘Now GOD will do in judgment what they should have done in contrition, 'break down their altars, and spoil their images.' (Clarke)

**Hosea 10:3-8 Israel’s empty throne**

**3Then they will say, ‘We have no king because we did not revere the Lord. But even if we had a king, what could he do for us?’ 4They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a ploughed field. 5The people who live in Samaria fear for the calf-idol of Beth Aven.Its people will mourn over it and so will its idolatrous priests, those who had rejoiced over its splendour, because it is taken from them into exile. 6It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced; Israel will be ashamed of its foreign alliances. 7Samaria’s king will be destroyed, swept away like a twig on the surface of the waters. 8The high places of wickednesswill be destroyed – it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’**

**We have no king…**: Under God’s judgment, the Assyrians eventually removed the kingship from Israel, firstly by appointing their own puppet king and turning the country into an Assyrian vassal state, then by removing the entire kingship.

**…the calf-idol… will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king**: The idols that the people had set up for themselves – the ones that they had given their honour and trust, would be taken by the invaders as treasure for their kings. The Assyrian king is also seemingly given a title higher than Israel’s king – ‘great’.

**Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars**: After the exile will come a period of desolation for the country and places that were once centres of activity, will become overgrown by weeds and foliage.

**Hosea 10:9-12 God tells Israel to break up the hard ground of their heart**

**9‘Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, Israel and there you have remained. Will not war again overtake the evildoers in Gibeah? 10When I please, I will punish them; nations will be gathered against them to put them in bonds for their double sin. 11Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her fair neck. I will drive Ephraim, Judah must plough and Jacob must break up the ground. 12Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.**

**Since the days of Gibeah, you have sinned…**: **Gibeah** has already been mentioned in **9:9** and whilst there was a battle which was meant to eradicate the sin involved, other sin remained. Here, God points out that His people have not progressed and so He wants them to recognise their sin and repent of it.

**…so I will put a yoke on her fair neck…**: Like a farm animal, God will control and guide Israel and Jacob, even if they resist. When the yoke is placed on the animal, they lose the ability to choose their own route – they come under control, whether they want to be, or not.

**…Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit…**: Israel had sown the seed of sin and they have been warned that will result in the ‘**fruit**’ of God’s judgment if they do not repent. Yet even at that late time, if the people choose to **sow righteousness**, they can **reap the fruit of** (God’s) **unfailing love**.

**…break up your unploughed ground**: God builds on the picture of sowing and reaping by telling Israel to plough ground (some translations have fallow) that hasn’t been used for at least a year. It will probably be hard and resistant to both the plough and to the seed which will struggle to get a hold. Unploughed/fallow/unprepared ground is of little use for sowing seed - it must be broken up and prepared first.

Jesus described this hard soil in the parable of the soils - **Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23** - the hard ground will not allow the seed of the word to penetrate and become fruitful.

**For it is time to seek the LORD**: the unploughed ground is broken up when we seek the LORD, rather than by trying to do things for ourselves, or by turning to idols. …**for it is time…** ‘It should be done immediately: the season is passing; if you do not get the seed in the ground, the early rain will be past and your fields will be unfruitful.’ (Clarke)

**…until He comes and showers His righteousness on you**: God tells us that we should ‘break up the fallow ground and sow the seed of righteousness, until the harvest comes.’ (Guzik)

‘God uses the illustrations of sowing and reaping to remind us that harvest may be a season away. Stick with sowing in righteousness, to reap the fruit in due time.’ (Guzik)

**Hosea 10:13-15 God warns Israel not to resist Him**

**13But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors,
14the roar of battle will rise against your people, so that all your fortresses will be devastated –
as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of battle, when mothers were dashed to the ground with their children. 15So will it happen to you, Bethel, because your wickedness is great. When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.**

**Because you have depended on your own strength…**: This is the basis of all sin – trusting in our own way or strength, instead of in God's way. ‘Ruin always comes when we trust in our **own way** instead of God's way and that ruin was about to come upon Israel.’ (Guzik)

Shalman (Shalmaneser) is an Assyrian king, who is also mentioned in **2 Kings 17:3-4** & **19:9**. He made king Hoshea of Israel his vassal, forcing payment of a yearly tribute. After a time, Hoshea ceased paying, which led to a second Assyrian invasion and a three-year siege of the city of Samaria. When the city fell, Hoshea was imprisoned and a final deportation of the people took place in 722BC, resulting in the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as a nation.

The Assyrians settled the abandoned towns of Israel with foreigners, who adopted the Hebrew religion and eventually became the people that we know Biblically as Samaritans.\*

Hoshea’s departure fulfilled the prophecy - **the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.**

**Hosea 11:1-4 Israel: Loved by God, but following the Baals.**

**‘When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. 2But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. 3It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them. 4I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek and I bent down to feed them.**

 **…I loved him and out of Egypt I called My son**: God remembers His love for Israel, at the time when they were a new nation, bringing them out of **Egypt** – about 500 years previously.

This verse is a prophecy relating to the Messiah, which was fulfilled during Jesus’ lifetime **Matthew 2:15** relates how the words **out of Egypt I called My son** relate to Jesus returning from Egypt as a child, following Him being taken their to escape from Herod’s massacre of the infant boys.

**But the more they were called, the more they went from me**: God called Israel out of Egypt – out of idolatry - but by worshipping the Baals as they ‘called’ to Israel, meant the people left the LORD and worshipped Canaanite gods instead.

**…I …taught Ephraim to walk …but they did not realise it was I who healed them**: God provides blessings and provision to His people all of the time – much of it we are unaware of. Even so, it is dishonouring to God if we attribute His blessing to some other source.

…t**aking them by the arms**: This pictures a parent teaching a child how to walk by holding the child's arms and supporting them as they make their first steps – the parent provides all of the support.

**I led them with cords of human kindness…**: God uses gentleness to lead His people, never harsh manipulation or coercion - He wants to win us over, but not with brute force. Again, we should be reminded that God will use trials and hardship at times, but only to draw us back to Him.

‘God calls us as an army of free men, grateful patriots of the kingdom of God.’ (Guzik)

‘…it is true that no man comes to God except he is drawn; but it is equally true that God draweth no man contrary to the constitution of man…’ (Spurgeon)

**…I bent down to feed them**: God humbled Himself to minister to His needy people. It would be beneath the gods of that time to bend down for their followers, but God does not consider that conduct is dishonouring to Him – this is the very nature of the suffering servant and the nature of Jesus as laid out in **Philippians 2:5-11**.

**Hosea 11:5-7 Insincere worship will bring God’s judgement**

**5‘Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? 6A sword will flash in their cities; it will devour their false prophets and put an end to their plans. 7My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them.**

**…because they refuse to repent**: The sin of the people in following other gods was one thing, but their failure to repent is recorded as the reason that God will deal with them.

**My people are determined to turn from Me. Even though they call Me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them**: Turning from God can be described as backsliding. Israel’s history clearly showed they once had a really close walk with God, but now that is in the past. History tells us that God took back His people on numerous occasions when the repented and cried out to Him, but even that appears now to be in the past.

That leaves their expressions of praise to God as being empty. They call to **God the Most High** as a formality, rather than to **exalt** Him.

**Hosea 11:8-9 God's sympathy, despite His warnings**

**8‘How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. 9I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God and not a man – the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.**

**How can I give you up, Ephraim?** Despite all the warnings of the oncoming judgement, God takes no pleasure in these events. On the contrary, He says His **compassion is aroused**.

Everyone is sinful and guilty before God, so in response to God’s own question of **How can I give you up?** which is what God’s justice demands, He sends Jesus, who ‘gave up’ His life on the cross in our place.

**Admah** and **Zeboyim** were two cities also destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah **Deuteronomy 29:23**. God is saying that He doesn’t want His people to be destroyed.

**I will not… devastate Ephraim**: Though their sin deserves it, God will not wipe out Israel. He will leave a remnant and will restore the nation.

**For I am God and not man**: ‘The longsuffering, forgiveness, and compassion of the Lord toward His people seems unbelievable until we recognise that He is **not man**, but God. His love and forgiveness are of a different order. His sinless and consistent nature has been lost to us when sin entered.’ (Guzik)

‘What passes for forgiveness among men is nothing like the amazing forgiveness of God. "Suppose that someone had grievously offended any one of you and that he asked your forgiveness. Do you not think that you would probably say to him, 'Well, yes, I forgive you; but I cannot forget it'? That is a sort of forgiveness with one leg chopped off, it is a lame forgiveness and is not worth much."’ (Spurgeon)

**Hosea 11:10-12 God calls Israel back.**

**10They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. 11They will come from Egypt, trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, fluttering like doves. I will settle them in their homes,’ declares the Lord. 12Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.**

**When He roars, His children will come trembling from the west**: God is speaking of the ultimate restoration of Israel, an expression of His mercy to Ephraim as a whole.

**Ephraim has surrounded Me with lies**: God makes these promises knowing the present state of both kingdoms – north and south. Israel. Though Judah is (just) in a better place than Israel, God makes the promises knowing their state and that they will continue to fall away from Him.

**Hosea 12:1 Israel’s trusts in alliances with surrounding nations.**

**12 Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.**

**Ephraim feeds on the wind**: The inference here is that the people are ‘feeding on the wind’ – it has no substance or nourishment. Similar to Israel trusting in their useless idols and foreign alliances.

‘The east wind is not only empty, but also dangerous and destructive. It was and still is, in all countries, a parching, wasting, injurious wind.’ (Clarke)

**He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil Egypt**: Instead of trusting the LORD, Israel made deals and paid off the surrounding superpowers. It was foolish for them to think Assyria or Egypt was more powerful or dependable than the LORD.

**Hosea 12:2-6 Ancient Jacob compared with Israel's present deceit.**

**2The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. 3In the womb he grasped his brother’s heel; as a man he struggled with God. 4He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favour. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there – 5the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name! 6But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice and wait for your God always.**

**In the womb he grasped his brother’s heel**: God looks back at Jacob, to make a comparison with Israel in Hosea’s time. Jacob grasped his brother’s heel as he was born **Genesis 25:26** and the phrase ‘heel-catcher’ described a double-dealer, someone who was crafty and dishonest. Through Hosea, God says, ‘That was Jacob then and it is Israel now.’

**…he struggled with the angel…**: This recalls the struggle recounted in **Genesis 32:24-30**. Whilst Jacob refused to submit to God, he eventually did submit in a literal wrestling match.

**He struggled with the Angel and overcame Him; he wept and begged for His favour**: This verse has to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, as Hosea adds two further details that are not included in the **Genesis 32** account - he says Jacob **overcame** as well as that he **wept** in the struggle.

‘How can it be said that Jacob **overcame**? He **overcame** in the only way anyone can when they struggle against God. We overcome when we lose and know it, surrendering to God. Why is it important to know that Jacob **wept**? Because it helps us understand how desperate and broken he was, as he hung on the LORD, now pleading only for a blessing.’ (Guzik)

**But you must return to your God… wait for your God always**.: A reminder that we must always seek God, do His will, but also wait upon Him – He will reveal Himself in His way and in His time.

**Hosea 12:7-11 Israel’s wealth will not save them**

**7The merchant uses dishonest scales and loves to defraud. 8Ephraim boasts, ‘I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin.’ 9‘I have been the Lord your God ever since you came out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed festivals. 10I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them.’ 11Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a ploughed field.**

**I have become wealthy**: Hosea’s prophecy was during a time of economic prosperity, contrasting with a spiritual and moral decline in Israel. When the economy is going well, it is often difficult to see that society is in trouble – **with all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin**.

**Merchant** is translated in other versions as Canaanite, or businessman. Canaanites were known to be merchants and traders. ‘Ephraim is as corrupt as those heathenish traffickers were.’(Clarke)

**I will make you live in tents again…**: Part of God's judgment will bring exile and humble dwellings again. This judgment is certain - God **spoke to the prophets**, but the people did not listen.

**Their altars will be like piles of stones on a ploughed field**: Pagan altars were built high and stately to add dignity to the pagan god – but God’s judgment will destroy them to heaps of rubble.

**Hosea 12:12-14 Ephraim will suffer because they reject God**

**12Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife and to pay for her he tended sheep. 13The Lord used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.
14But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.**

**Jacob fled to the country of Aram**: Hosea connects the coming exile of Israel and the ‘exile’ of Jacob when he fled from Esau, to his uncle Laban in Syria.

**…by a prophet he cared for him. …his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed…**: God send prophets, but Israel continually rejected His word. They **aroused His bitter anger…**, so God will leave them in their guilt – they will reap their contempt for despising that the Lord cared for them.