An Outline of Hosea

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1. **An Introduction to the Book**

a. The Author

All we know about Hosea comes from his book. He was prophesying in the Northern Kingdom of Israel after Amos and before Isaiah who both spoke to the people in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The messages recorded in the book were probably given to him between 754-714 B.C.

It is probable that Hosea met his death in the dark and violent days before the capture of Samaria by the Assyrian army. No other prophet in the Old Testament comes nearer to the New Testament revelation of the love of God.

b. The Purpose of the Book

The Northern Kingdom was ripe for destruction. This took place about 20 years after Hosea's time of prophesying. He said some harsh things: ***"Israel was like a silly dove … fluttering everywhere but not to God"***. The purpose of his ministry was to reveal the love of God for a sinful and rebellious people. He pictures his nation as a faithless wife. The people of God were committing spiritual adultery. Hosea pleads with them to repent and turn from their ungodly ways. Unless they do this there will be a time of refining, but God's love for them will always remain.

c. The Background to the Book

i. <u>The Political Situation</u>

Before 802 B.C. the Assyrian army had attacked Damascus and destroyed it. For the next 50 years Assyria was greatly weakened by both internal strife and civil war. Also it was attacked by Urartu (the Armenians). In the political vacuum left by them in Damascus and in what is now north west Syria – Hamath (now called Homs) on the Orontes River – many bitter wars were fought against each other and as a result both of them were greatly weakened.

The king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam II, was an able military ruler and succeeded in enlarging the territory of Israel to the size it was under King Solomon. [2 Kings 14:23-29]. During this period the Northern Kingdom grew in prosperity as it controlled the trade routes coming up from the Red Sea to the great trading port of Tyre in what is now South Lebanon. This brought great wealth to the Northern Kingdom and many splendid and costly buildings were constructed. Many of these ruins have been dug up by archaeologists and they have even found ivory in the ruins. So during the period of Hosea's ministry, the people were wealthy – even better off than in the time under King Solomon.

But wealth led to social disintegration, the rich grinding the faces of the poor. So outwardly the rulers and the leading families were rich, but inwardly the people were in a rotten and sick state.

After Jeroboam II's death in 746 B.C., there was chaos and anarchy for about 25 years until the Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians. See 2 Kings 15 for this period. There was a collapse of law and order, neither life nor property were safe. The whole fabric of society was torn apart – brother against brother, class against class, town against town. Paganism was rife together with drunkenness, debauchery and sexual licence, all of which was under the religious auspices of the religion of Ba'al. [See Isaiah 9:19 ff]

Assyria then had a new ruler – Tiglath-Pilesar III (745-727 B.C.). He was a great warrior king. He attacked Babylon and other Chaldean kingdoms. He attacked the Medes (who we now call Kurds) and the Armenians. In 743 B.C. he marched and attacked what is now Lebanon and Syria and subdued them. In 732 B.C. the Northern Kingdom was attacked and destroyed and most of the people were taken away as captives – 27,290 people according to Assyrian sources. That was the end of the Northern Kingdom.

In Israel, during Hosea's time (750-722 B.C.), there were seven kings ruling over the Northern Kingdom just before the Assyrian invasion that conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.

- Jeroboam II 41 years 793-753 B.C. (see 2 Kings 14 – especially v. 24)
- Zechariah 6 months 753 B.C. (2 Kings 15:8-12)
- Shallum 1 month 752 B.C. (2 Kings 15:13-15)

- Menaem 10 years 752-742 B.C. (2 Kings 15:16-32) He offered a considerable bribe to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria.
- Pekahiah 2 years 752-773 B.C. (2 Kings 15:23-26)
- Pekah 18 years 742-740 (2 Kings 15:27-31)
- Hoshea 9 years 732-723 (2 Kings 15:30)

[Pekah began as a ruling rival of Menahem in 752 B.C. This rivalry lasted 10 years (2 Kings 15:17) until Menahem's death in 742. From 742-740 Pekah and Pekahiah maintained rival thrones (2 Kings 15:23), with Pekah beginning his sole rule of the Northern Kingdom in 740 B.C. with his assassination of Pekahiah. Pekah's reign ended when he was assassinated by Hoshea in 732 (2 Kings 15:30).]

Read Isaiah 9:19 ff to see how black the situation was. International tensions are not new in this area!

ii. The Religious Situation

Following the death of Solomon there was the division of the Kingdom into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. These existed side-by-side. Sometimes they had a friendly and co-operative relationship, but at other times there was enmity and war between them.

Both kingdoms fell into idolatry and corruption and turned away from God, but this was much more rapid in the Northern Kingdom. So, in some senses, the Northern Kingdom committed spiritual and national suicide first, with the result that they were destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6-8).

As you read the 200 year record of the Northern Kingdom, you can see a recurring phrase: ***"… and he did that which is evil in the sight of the Lord."*** Most of the kings of the Northern Kingdom were a sorry lot. So Hosea lived in difficult and dangerous times. But it was also the time of some of the greatest preaching of all time – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah (1-39) and Micah are all regarded as 8th century B.C. prophets. The outstanding message of these prophets is God's justification of the coming judgement on the Northern Kingdom (in Hosea's case). It is a judgement on the injustice and inhumanity of the great and powerful towards the weak, the poor and the helpless. The first and greatest commandment is, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might".*** But it is also true that, ***"If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."*** (1 Jn. 4:20)

Amos saw that the fundamental characteristic of God was justice – justice displayed against those who had sinned against their own conscience even when they were not a covenant people. But the people of the Northern Kingdom should have had a greater awareness of the justice of God when they sinned against the covenant that God had given them.

Hosea was concerned about his people's doings in the light of God's love for them. He had learned through his own broken family life the acute sufferings of love when faced with unfaithfulness. So as he looked at his nation, with all its sins of the rich and powerful as they ground the poor into the dust, he saw it above all as a violation of love, for all his people were members of God's family chosen by Him in love. The violations of all the laws of God were not the main concern to Hosea. To him, the very sad departure of God's people from the love of the God who had freed them from slavery in Egypt and made them His people, grieved him enormously. Hosea also saw that God's people, with no love for God, would miss out on all the privileges of the blessings of God.

So Hosea spoke to a backslidden, worldly and independent people who were blinded by compromise and sinful living. They didn't recognise their own condition and they didn't realise that judgement was inevitable and close at hand. Hosea could see what was happening and knew there could be only one outcome – judgement on a national scale. But there was an alternative and that was the gracious forgiveness and love of God. So Hosea pleaded for repentance and a return to the ways of God.

It is hard to bring justice and love together, but Hosea gives some amazing insights as to how God is able to do this.

Amos prophesied ~ 760 B.C.

Hosea prophesied ~ 750-722 B.C.

Jonah prophesied ~ 760 B.C.

Isaiah prophesied ~ 740-700 B.C.

While Jehovah was the God of the people of the Northern Kingdom, the gods of the Canaanites were perceived to be the owners of the land. The interests of Jehovah and His demands were seen as mainly ethical. For most of the time there was considerable tension between the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel, so the temple in Jerusalem had very little impact on the people of the Northern Kingdom. The gods of the Canaanites were fertility gods that governed the growth of crops and fruit – especially vines – and these gods made mainly ritualistic demands. The different gods and goddesses had particular control over different aspects of life. There were three main gods – a sky god, an earth goddess and they had a son. All male gods were called Ba'al meaning 'lord' or 'owner'. Goddesses were all called Ashtoreth.

After the death of Joshua, there was a steady decline – more in the Northern Kingdom than in Judah. There were two aspects to this decline:

- Local gods and goddesses were acknowledged as being secondary to Jehovah.
- They worshipped Jehovah as though He was merely a super-Ba'al in character with the same claims that Ba'al had on them.

For example: Jeroboam I made bull-shaped idols and told the people to worship them. (1 Kings 12:28, 32) So the people threw away everything that related to the worship of the God that Moses had taught them about.

For the pre-exilic prophets, the worshipping of one's own concept of Jehovah is the same as worshipping a false god, for no distinction is being made between worshipping a local Ba'al and worshipping a 'Canaanised' Jehovah.

Samuel tried to break this trend. David was certainly no Ba'al worshipper, yet he gave the name Ba'aliada to one of his children. (2 Samuel 5:17-21)

But the Canaanite influence was far greater in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Melkart, the Ba'al of Tyre, was very popular. Both Elijah and Elisha fought against this influence on the Northern Kingdom. Hosea clearly shows us that the idea of a 'Ba'alised' Jehovah was widespread – a god much more interested in sacrifices and ritual than in conduct.

Further, though the prophets never mention it for shame, the 'Canaanised' Jehovah must have been provided with a "wife" and part of the worship would have been prostitution at the shrines/temples in order to magically increase the fertility of the land. This naturally led to growing immorality with all its consequences.

d. A Brief Overview of the Book

i. <u>Hosea and his faithless wife</u> (ch. 1-3)

Here we come across a moral difficulty, for Hosea the prophet is told by God to marry a prostitute. This implies God ordered him to do something that was immoral! In response to the Lord's command, Hosea married Gomer and they had three children each of whom had symbolic names. How are we to understand this? There are two ways to understand it:

- **A literal interpretation**: if we choose the literal, historical option, we need to choose from four further options:
  - ✓ When Hosea married Gomer he knew she was already a prostitute.
  - ✓ When Hosea married Gomer only God knew that she was already a prostitute.
  - ✓ When Hosea married Gomer he knew that later she would become a prostitute.
  - ✓ When Hosea married Gomer only God knew she would become a prostitute.

The third and fourth options are the most likely because at one time the people of God in the Northern Kingdom had been unfaithful – see Jeremiah 3:6-14.

So there were possibly two stages in the Northern Kingdom relating to God:

1. Initially they were faithful.
2. They had already backslidden into spiritual adultery (idolatry).

The first stage fits into the facts that Hosea had to deal with regarding Gomer. It is unthinkable that our righteous, holy God, who cannot look upon sin, would command Hosea to commit an act that we can see is morally wrong.

Hosea went and married Gomer who then became a prostitute and she bore children with the terrible name of "children of whoredom". As each child was born, Hosea took the occasion to proclaim to the people of the Northern Kingdom the message that God had given him. The advantage of this approach is that the book reads like a straightforward narrative. But the disadvantage is that if Hosea did marry a woman who was already known as a prostitute, wouldn't this act have destroyed all the effectiveness of his ministry? There is also an additional complication and that is the time element. Hosea delivered his prophetic messages about a year before each child was born. This implies that the messages would have had little continuity in their effectiveness.

But whatever the possible reasons for God's command to Hosea to marry Gomer, Hosea obeyed. Hosea lived about the same time as Jonah and he probably knew what happened to that prophet when he tried to disobey God.

Hosea himself was clearly a man of high moral and spiritual standards. He also revealed strong personal convictions about loyalty and faithfulness. So I think he fell in love with a beautiful girl. He courted her. They were both Israelites with the traditions of God's people and they shared a common faith.

A symbolic interpretation – i.e. the entire message was given as it now stands:

ii. The Lord God and His faithless Israel (ch. 4-14)

It was God's purpose to bring the people of the Northern Kingdom and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) into one Kingdom. (Ezek. 37:16-19) The Northern Kingdom consisted of 10 tribes and they were separated from Judah at the time of King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. They frequently fought against Judah/Benjamin (the Southern Kingdom). Both Kingdoms would go into exile – the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom to Babylon.

The messages in chapters 4-14 are hard to compile into an outline because they are submerged in the emotional make-up of the book. The sentences fall from Hosea like the sobs of a broken heart.

For Further Study: look at spiritual backsliding in both the Old and the New Testaments.

2. Hosea as God's Preacher of Salvation (ch. 1-3)

a. God had long since planned his name – Hosea

Hosea is the Old Testament form of 'Jesus' meaning 'Saviour'. So Hosea is seen as a "type" of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

b. God selected Hosea's wife (v. 3)

God began to speak with Hosea. We don't know how long or how often He spoke. Hosea was probably reluctant to be appointed to this ministry. Names are mentioned – i.e. Gomer – because they were real people, but the words also apply to us since we are like them.

Gomer was a respectable person (2:14-15) and she was, in all probability, like any other bride on her wedding day. They had a typical Near Eastern happy courtship and there was nothing initially to show that she was of ill fame.

But Gomer was a shallow person. (2:5) She appears to become increasingly disinterested in Hosea and increasingly interested in clothes and material things. She delivered a little baby girl and the baby was called Ru-ha-mah meaning 'no mercy'. Hosea began to realise that all was not well in the family.

In the Old Testament, names usually have a specific meaning. Children weren't just named because the parents liked the name or because it was a family name. Names were often used in memory of an act of God, like an answered prayer. Hannah called her son 'Samuel' meaning 'asked of God' because she had so earnestly prayed for a child. (1 Sam. 1:20)

Three children were born into the home of Hosea and Gomer. Each of their names is significant.

c. God determined Hosea's message

Through this terrible breach in Gomer's love for Hosea, God was beginning to show Hosea the message he was to proclaim to the Northern Kingdom. This is a summary of the content of the message:

i. It was to be **an intimate message** from the heart of the prophet.

In a small measure, it was a reflection of God's heart to the nation. Hosea tells us, with amazing candour, of his courtship, his marriage and his first son – Jezreel. Jezreel was a town famous in the Northern Kingdom. It is in a valley we commonly associate with Armageddon. (See Rev. 16:16)

Then Hosea goes on to tell of the gathering of dark shadows in their family life. He tells of Gomer's shallow pursuit of the cheap and tawdry things she longed for. He tells a little of the degradation into which she fell. Then he tells us how God told him to bring her back to the family. So we begin to realise that through Hosea's marriage, God was preparing his heart, mind and emotions for his great prophetic ministry.

So often there is a pattern in our lives. Before we can bless, we must bleed. What is my drift and what is your drift? Am I growing cold spiritually? Am I a Gomer?

ii. It was **an abrupt message** to the heart of the nation – the Northern Kingdom.

This nation was suffering from a tremendous epidemic – unfaithfulness! Like the people of the Northern Kingdom, we rush to find protection from the "Assyrians". They sent for help to Egypt. Israel is a symbol of the church of Jesus Christ who, in many places, both in times past but also in the present, appears to have a corrupt message to 'Ba'al' – i.e. to our own culture – money, power and immorality. They deserted the true and living God for a cheap, tawdry, tinsel lifestyle. Then comes God's judgement that will separate the dross from the pure metal. The result will be that the people of the Northern Kingdom will be brought back to their God – first back home and then back to obedience.

We too forsake our love for God for the love of the benefits of the world that we live in.

iii. It was **an amazing message** from the heart of God.

There can be re-united fellowship with God! God told Hosea to take Gomer back again as his wife. In that culture, this could only come from God. In behaving as she did, Gomer heaped very great shame on herself. It was an honour-shame culture. Gomer had shamed herself and Hosea terribly. If such an event happened today in the Near East it would involve an "honour killing".

By taking Gomer back, Hosea heaped all that shame upon himself! His action, in obedience to God, was 'God-like'. And Hosea had to pay to get her back. God's heart yearns for 'Gomers'.

1 Pet. 2:10, ***"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."***

3. The Message in the Mirror of Hosea's Home

a. Their courtship (1:2-3)

This is the written record of their courtship written long after the period. Hosea fills in some of the data later (e.g. 2:14) as he looks back through the long years of their blighted lives. Their courtship was based on <u>attraction</u> (Gen. 2:22). We are attracted towards our bridegroom – the Lord Jesus. Their courtship was nurtured in fellowship – the word in Hebrew for 'wilderness' can also mean 'solitude'. There is no future tense, so their courtship may have gone on <u>for a long time</u> and they obviously enjoyed it. It takes time to really get to know the Lord Jesus. Their courtship spoke to their hearts with comfort and tenderness. (See the Song of Solomon as an example: S of S. 2:10-13. Their courtship ripened into engagement. ***"She shall sing there as in the days of her youth"***. (2:15)

So Gomer gave the answer that Hosea longed to hear. He had probably guessed what she would say, but she put it into song! This is not a mere "yes", but she was also showing her joy and happiness. Is this not a mirror of how the Lord Jesus won us?

Marriage is a figurative representation of a believer's relationship with the Lord Jesus. (See Eph. 5:3-32; Jn. 14:3; Rev. 19:7-9) What can mar this intimate relationship? Our spiritual adultery! (James 4:4)

b. Their Marriage (11:1-4)

i. Gomer had a new status – the status of her bridegroom. We are called the 'Sons of God'! But very sadly Gomer did not value this new status. She was somewhat like Esau (Gen. 25:29-34) who sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew and some bread.

ii. Gomer had a new freedom. (11:4) There is usually a liberation of our personalities in marriage. Gomer retained this freedom, but very sadly she used it to destroy herself. The same is still true in some Near Eastern cultures where unmarried women are usually very restricted and married women are much freer.

iii. Gomer had a new security. Her husband would give her security and would provide all her needs. God gives us, His children, security. He supplies us with all the material things we need as well as the important things such as wisdom, righteousness, redemption and sanctification.

c. Their Family Life (1:4-9)

For many husbands, the birth of their first child confirms the idea of having 'grown up'! Enoch walked with God after Methuselah was born. (Gen. 5:21) God gave to us His Son, the Lord Jesus; His name was the same as 'Hosea'. (Mt. 1:21) Perhaps Hosea was planning to give his son a great name such as "Prince with God". But no, God told him the little baby boy should be called **'Jezreel'** meaning 'scattered', 'devastated'. This little boy was to be a symbol of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. As long as this little boy ran about the home and courtyard, he was a constant reminder to Hosea of the coming destruction of his nation and the people he loved and was called to minister to.

The town of Jezreel is located in a plain in northern Israel. King Ahab built a large palace there. It was the scene of violence and bloodshed on various occasions.

Gomer conceived again and bore a daughter. There is no reference to Hosea. God said the baby's name was 'no mercy' or 'never-to-know-a-father's-pity'! God was implying to Hosea that the little girl was not his daughter. Why did God do this? Because the Northern Kingdom was to God, what Gomer was to Hosea. Why? So Hosea could begin to understand the grief and hurt that God felt.

In verses 8-9 God said in effect, "Under no conditions are you my people". So God began to speak to this grieving husband about His plan to destroy the Northern Kingdom. Hosea grieved and his heart and his mind bled, but he did not retaliate or rebuke Gomer.

Jeremiah, speaking to the Southern Kingdom of Judah based in Jerusalem, begins with, ***"I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they went far from Me and went after worthless idols and became worthless?"*** (Jer. 2:2-13)

The passage ends with, ***"Has a nation ever changed their gods, even though they are no gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled at this O heavens, be shocked and utterly desolate, declares the Lord. My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters and have dug cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!"***

Why do our hearts grow cold towards God? The reasons given for Gomer's behaviour are: (2:1-8)

i. Heartlessness: (v. 2) she renounced her first love and became public property – a prostitute.

ii. Material things: (v. 5) ***"bread, wool, flax, oil …."*** It has been stated that our Creator God provides us with:

- land and soil to produce food

- a helpmeet – a companion by our side
- beasts of burden (horses, oxen, camels etc.) to help serve Him

Yet according to the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:16-20, these are the very blessings that keep us from God because we have not dedicated them to God:

"I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it."

"I have married a wife and I cannot come."

"I have bought five yoke of oxen."

All of them refused to come to the wedding feast!

So, in Gomer's case, it led to her destitution (v. 5-6) caused by her desertion. Hosea found her shamed and deserted and probably sold into slavery. Gomer found that sin's price is degradation and distress. Sin both defiles and separates.

This will happen to us if we forsake God. In verses 9-13 we see the reason why Gomer did not return to Hosea – pride.

d. The Miracle of Hosea's Love

Here is a situation that is unparalleled in the Old Testament. We see some hope in chapter 2:15, ***"And there I will give to her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor (meaning 'trouble') a door of hope. And she shall answer as in the days of her youth."***

The key to the whole book is the intensity of Hosea's love for Gomer. What hurt him very deeply was that Gomer no longer loved him and she had transferred her affection to material things.

So now there was a new engagement! God does this to us. Any discouraged, broken believer can be restored just as Hosea restored Gomer.

i. <u>An old plan made new: a door of hope</u> (Joshua 7:10, 20-25)

> ***"The Lord said to Joshua, 'Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?' And Achan answered Joshua, 'Truly, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel and this is what I did ….' And Joshua said to Achan, 'Why did you bring this trouble on us?' The culprit was then stoned to death in the valley of Achor*** (trouble)***."***

So this is the last place one would expect to meet with God. But as we meet with God, He is able to make our 'valley of trouble' a door of hope! God wants to meet us in the place (circumstances) where we disobeyed Him.

ii. <u>An old relationship made new</u> (v. 16)

'Ishi' literally means 'my master', but the accent is much more like 'my dear husband'. Ba'al means 'master' in the sense of 'dictator' or 'big boss'. So Gomer represents a wayward believer who learns to love her 'husband' through the constancy of her husband's heart who never, ever forsook her.

iii. <u>An old response made new</u>

Gomer says, in a deeper, richer and more wonderful language, 'My dear husband'. Is this sheer indulgence on the part of God? Look at 2:18-23 (especially v. 23), ***"And I will have mercy on 'no mercy'. I will say to those called 'not my people', you are My people and they will say, 'You are my God'."***

This covenant of grace is a picture of the heart of God. It is conditional on repentance and it consummates a new marriage for ever into righteousness: in judgement, in mercy, in faithfulness and in lovingkindness.

"I will betroth you" is repeated 3 times in 2:19-20 and it is an absolutely staggering commitment! It is grounded in the heart of God, ***"I will betroth you to Me for ever"***. Though this is all of grace, it is not cheap. For us, it cost the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross and all that was involved in that. Sin, in the last analysis, in its most terrible form, is infidelity to love. It hurts God! It destroys the sinner. God never condones sin, but He can and does redeem the sinner.

e. Hosea brings Gomer home again: Restoration

i. God commanded this: only God could enable Hosea to go and bring Gomer back home. But if God commands, He also enables!

ii. A comparison with her former life: Hosea shows us in 2:23 that God has plans. The great music of transformed lives. The terrible negation was to be removed. ***"You are My people – I will have pity."***
Jer. 31:3 says, ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you."***

iii. There is a price to pay to bring Gomer home.

"So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley." (3:2)
A homer is about 6 bushels or 220 litres plus a lethek (110 litres) – so a total of ~330 litres of barley. Old Testament scholars estimate that in monetary terms the total would be about 30 shekels of silver – the price of a slave. (Ex. 21:32; Lev. 27:4) This was also the price paid for the betrayal of the Lord Jesus.

Notice Hosea's poverty. He could only just pay. In Ex. 21:32, 30 shekels was the price the owner of a slave was to receive if an ox happened to gore a slave.

iv. The one condition that Hosea required of Gomer (v. 3)

Hosea required from Gomer mutual love. ***"We love Him, because He first loved us."*** 1 Jn. 4:19

4. The Story of the Prodigal Nation (ch. 4-7)

This is God's application of the lessons Hosea learned dealing with himself and his wayward wife Gomer to his people, the wayward people of the Northern Kingdom in all their wickedness and desertion.

a. The Lord's controversy with his people (4:1-9)

This is very similar to the controversy of our Lord Jesus with His people. God is the great controversialist. We see this again and again when God spoke through the Old Testament prophets. We see it again as the Lord Jesus confronts the religious leaders of His day. Here God is speaking as a judge. ***"The Lord will judge His people."*** (Heb. 10:30)

But God is not an impartial judge, for He is also the Crown Prosecutor – out to find us, the accused, guilty!

i. God is against the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom (v. 1-4)

This is a comprehensive charge to all the rulers, all the princes, the prophets (false prophets) and the common people. Why? They had all committed sins of omission. There was no truth. ***"Your word is truth."*** (Jn. 17:7) These Old Testament people of God were not without the truth, but they had rejected it (v. 6). Sadly, this is also true of our western world.

- **No mercy**: our Western world is an increasingly cut throat world commercially and financially.
- **No knowledge of God**: this is an experiential knowledge of God in their own lives.
  Jer. 4:22 says, ***"For My people are foolish; they know Me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are 'wise' in doing evil! But how to do good they know not."***

  No truth, no mercy and no experiential knowledge only results in wilful ignorance.
  Rom. 1:21-22 says, ***"For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God."***
- **They were guilty of sins of commission**: swearing, lying, stealing, adultery and murder. As a result, anguish and loss became the common lot of most of the people. The list breaks all of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. This led to the question of the survival of the nation. The only way for the Northern Kingdom – and any nation – to prosper, let alone survive, is to teach the children – by example and more formally – the knowledge of God.

  Please note that God:

- ✓ suffers when His people are unfaithful
- ✓ cannot tolerate or condone sin
- ✓ loves the sinner in spite of his sin
- ✓ seeks to restore the sinner

ii. God is against the priests of the land (v. 5-9)

The degradation of the people of the land was due to the priests – the religious leaders. The condition of the people in the land was due to the condition of the pulpits. This is always true! The priests rejected knowledge – 'the whole counsel of God'. This is true of us, the New Testament people of God. Read carefully Hebrews 6:1-3. The priests – remember the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers – tended to forget the terms of their call. In Acts, the apostle's call was to pray and to preach the Word of God. In Acts 6 the apostles realised they were being encumbered with "much serving" and seven outstanding men were called to help them with practical matters.

Some Biblical examples

- A soldier and his sword
  Ezek. 5:1 ***"O Son of Man, take a sharp sword."***
  Ezek. 5:2 ***"And a third part of you shall strike with the sword all around the city."***
  Ezek. 5:12 ***"A third part shall fall by the sword all around you."***
  Ezek. 5:17 ***"I will bring the sword upon you. I am the Lord. I have spoken."***
- The traveller and his light (Ps. 119:105)
  "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."
- The starving and food (Job 23:12)
  "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my portion of food."

b. The source and scope of the people's corruption in the Northern Kingdom (4:10-19)

i. The source: immorality and wine

The Book of Proverbs has much to say about how these two things are linked.

Prov. 20:1: ***"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler. Whoever is led astray by it is not wise."***

Prov. 23:30-32: ***"Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine … it goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like an adder."***

This is linked with Prov. 23:26: ***"My son, give Me your heart … for a prostitute is a deep pit; and adulteress is a narrow well. She lies in wait like a robber and increases the traitors among mankind."***

The people of the Northern Kingdom had failed to destroy the Canaanites and their religion at the time of Joshua. One of the results was that the religion of Ba'al worship with its associated fertility rites had started to grow among the people of God in the Northern Kingdom.

Gomer probably learned to flirt with men at their fertility festivals. Rom. 13:14 says***, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires."*** Purity is a battle for all of us in our culture and this is true in all cultures.

In 4: 17 we read, ***"Ephraim is joined to idols."*** Ephraim was the leading tribe in the Northern Kingdom and often God used this name for the Northern Kingdom as a whole (35 times!). In fact, Ephraim and the 9 smaller tribes were all equally joined to their idols and most of the few remaining followers of Yahweh felt there was no point in trying to stop them.

ii. The scope of the people's corruption

Hosea uses very plain speech! He uses 'whoredom' 8 times, 'whoredoms' 6 times, 'prostitutes' 3 times, 'lovers' 6 times, 'adultery' 3 times, 'lewdness' twice and similar types of words several more times.

The Lord Jesus also used plain words – Mt. 15:19-20, ***"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness and slander. These are what defile a person."***

Hosea makes three points:

- Such corruption dries up the source of knowledge. Corruption is from within us. It is not from outside sources and God searches the heart.
- Such corruption perverts judgement. Superstition and "popular" culture both tend to pervert our judgement so that our Holy Spirit directed judgement is replaced by superstition. This was true then and it is true now. Integrity is a gift of God.
- Such corruption blunts our moral consciousness. For example, frantic parents are often more frantic about their reputation than the behaviour and motivations of their children.

God is saying to the people of the Northern Kingdom that their knowledge of God has gone and He has given them up, ***"In the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to dishonouring their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed for ever. Amen."*** (Rom 1:26-32)

Hosea's picture of the Northern Kingdom was that of a nation that had lost its ability to evaluate, to choose, to distinguish and to act with discernment. This led to personal impurity in God's eyes.

Hosea found himself living in an atmosphere of idol worship – the worship of Ba'al. Ba'al worship had originated in Babylonia. In Canaan, Ba'al came to mean 'Lord'/'Master' and also had the sense of 'husband' and being connected to the sun god. So Ba'al was thought to provide warmth, light, good weather and good crops.

It also appears that there was a horrible fusion of the worship of YHWH with Ba'al worship. Hosea found that this idolatry was very deep-rooted – 4:17, ***"Ephraim is joined to idols***".

5. The Departure of God (ch. 5-7)

This is the response of God to the behaviour of the people of the Northern Kingdom.

a. The solemn fact of the departure of God (5:15-6)

"I will return again to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face and in their distress earnestly seek Me." (5:15)

Again we read in (5:6), ***"With their flocks and their herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him. He has withdrawn from them***."

God gave Adam a similar ultimatum, ***"If you sin…you will die."*** (Gen. 2:17). Adam did die (Gen. 5:5).

Are we sterile, unproductive believers? Has God left us? We have been warned not to quench the Holy Spirit in our lives. (1 Thess. 5:19)

b. The serious consequences of the departure of God (5:7, 14)

We read in Jer. 17:5, ***"Thus says the Lord, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord'."***

To the unbelieving human heart, human friends and allies, horses (or their modern day equivalent – perhaps guided missiles?) and men, armies, navys, planes, tanks and nuclear weapons seem more concrete and substantial than the promises of God.

i. <u>The judgement of the moth</u> (5:12)

In Isaiah 50:9 we read, ***"Behold all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up"***. Again in Isaiah 51:2 we read, ***"For the moth will eat them up like a garment and the worm eat them up like wool."***

So Hosea says in v. 12, ***"I am a moth to Ephraim"***.

Through Hosea God was warning the people of the Northern Kingdom, as Isaiah was to warn the Southern Kingdom, of the great approaching economic depression. There was a false sense of security among the people of the Northern Kingdom. This raises the issue: does our economic stability rest on the basis of our moral condition?

ii. The judgement of the lion (5:14)

"… and the young lion … I will carry off and no one shall rescue." God is warning the people of approaching political disaster and indeed it did come.

c. The sole remedy for the departure of God (5:15)

"I will return again to My place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face and in their distress earnestly seek Me."

d. Repentance Fails (ch. 6)

The people in the Northern Kingdom become afraid and they say, ***"Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn us that He may heal us. … after two days He will revive us …."*** (v. 1-2)

This sort of attitude has happened in our country. There was a national "Day of Prayer" in 1940 soon after Dunkirk. People say, *"There are no atheists in foxholes!"* Fear is usually individual.

Nora and I were in Amman during the Six-Day War when Israeli jets bombed parts of the city. It was terrible to see the mass panic in the population. But usually fear is individual. This has been called 'cheap repentance'. And here in the Northern Kingdom there were signs of cheap repentance. ***"Come let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us that He may heal us … after two days He will revive us and on the third day He will raise us up."***

They confessed a sense of hurt, but they didn't confess their sin. They were prepared to do penance, but there was no penitence. The function of time has nothing to do with repentance. A standard strategy of Satan is to cause the backslider to temporise. But there is only one way to deal with sin! ***"If we confess our sins, He*** (God) ***is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** (1 Jn. 1:9)

But the Northern Kingdom showed an amazing confidence for a people whose hearts were broken! See verse 3, "***Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."*** The assumption is, 'If we have done our part, God has got to do His!' But true repentance doesn't exhaust itself in emotion but in a changed life.

So God's dilemma in v. 4, ***"What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?"*** arose from two conditions:

i. Shallow hearts led to shallow repentance: ***"Your love is like the morning cloud; like the dew that goes away early."*** (v. 4)

ii. Their lives were full of hypocrisy. Forgiveness can't be won by simply offering sacrifices. God can see through them! They honoured God with their lips but their hearts were still far away.

God said, ***"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*** (6:6)

Here is a strong warning from the prophet Hosea. Warnings were one of the chief characteristics of Old Testament prophets. They are also a major point of emphasis in the apostolic Gospels. We, God's people, are ready to lapse into such alarming complacency and indifference. Micah 6:3 puts it this way, ***"O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer Me!"*** Verse 8 states God's requirements, ***"He has told you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and love with a steadfast love and to walk humbly with your God."***

See 1 Cor. 15:34, ***"Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame."*** The Lord Jesus demands from us a heart response and the reality of this response in our experience.

The problem caused by 'backsliding' is a stubborn, perverse refusal to 'walk in the light' with God. The Bible makes it very clear that when people deliberately sin against the truth, the results are always disastrous!

[See in the Old Testament: 1 Sam. 15:26; 2 Sam. 11:27; 12:7-12; Ezek. 2:3 and in the New Testament Rom. 1:18, 28; 2 Thess. 2:11-12.]

Whenever we prefer to follow our own sinful inclinations, we lose the truth. "Here a little and there a little", it slips away from us. Years of living in disobedience to the truth God has revealed to us, produces an ever-increasing lack of sensitivity to the truth. (see 6:7)

Very plainly Hosea teaches that it is very easy to develop habits of disobedience as well as habits of obedience. Such habits grow quickly and fruit comes abundantly in a really horrible harvest of spiritual confusion.

Hosea 6:7-11 – in these verses God charges them with hypocrisy and being treacherous. Gilead is a city of evildoers, 'stained with footprints of blood'. Ramoth-Gilead was meant to be a city of refuge, (Num. 35:9-15) but now it was a city of blood. The implication of this is that the 'spiritual leaders' in the Northern Kingdom were murderers! Just as bad as these were the idols in the sanctuary!

6. The Memory and the Forgetfulness of God (Ch. 7)

a. The heart of the problem

God remembered all their sins. He saw the people of the Northern Kingdom bowing down to do their penance in some form or other, but God remembered all their unconfessed sin. God's forgetfulness of our sins begins when our hearts are broken before Him.

In 7:9 we read, ***"Strangers devour his strength; he knows it not, grey hairs are sprinkled upon him and he knows it not."*** In Jer. 17:5 we read, ***"Thus says the Lord, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength'."*** And in the case of the Northern Kingdom, succumbs to diplomacy with the enemy!

The essence of the problem is sin. We are accountable to God and we cannot come to God on our own terms. This is a serious weakness in our culture – both as individuals and at the political level. This is supplemented by two further factors. Sometimes we sense the spiritual decay in our environment – the equivalent of v. 9, ***"Strangers devour his strength and he knows it not; grey hairs are sprinkled upon him and he knows it not."***

See also:

Eccl. 8:11, ***"Because Ephraim has multiplied altars of sinning, they have become <u>to him</u> altars for sinning."***

Jer. 5:12, ***"They have spoken falsely of the Lord and said, 'He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us nor shall we see sword or famine'."***

b. Some Great Illustrations:

- **A half-baked cake** (v. 8): cake burnt to a cinder one side while the other side remains damp and doughy. It is partly overdone and partly underdone. It isn't dough nor is it bread. It is completely spoiled. The people of the Northern Kingdom were half-fed living in a half-filled religion.
- **A silly dove** (v. 11): ***"Ephraim is like a dove easily deceived and senseless; now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria."*** The frantic politicians found themselves between a rock and a hard place trying to placate both Egypt and Assyria – the two local superpowers. In Hosea 13:9 God says, ***"He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against Me, against your helper."*** (See also Hosea 7:1)
- **Grey hairs** (v. 9): ***"Strangers devour his strength and he knows it not; grey hairs are sprinkled upon him and he knows it not".***

  In Deut. 32:25 as part of the Song of Moses, Moses sang, ***"In the street the sword shall make them childless; in their homes terror will reign. Young men and young women will perish infants and grey-haired men."***

'Grey hairs' are a word picture that is descriptive of the condition of backsliding. What are these grey hairs? They are the evidences of spiritual decline and decay.

- ✓ The 'grey hair' of falsehood (v. 1) ***"For they deal falsely."***

  We don't like to admit to failure and so we grow slack spiritually. But we do all we can to keep up the appearance of being spiritually alive. We act falsely, hypocritically – perhaps we sing some great hymns with great gusto. But it is easy to be insincere and profess much more than we really possess in our hearts. We read in Titus 1:16, ***"They profess to know God, but deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for any good work."***

- ✓ The 'grey hair' of adultery

  We are to love God with all our hearts and minds. This implies love for God that is single and undivided. But we find it so easy to try and love the world and to love the Lord Jesus. 1 Jn. 2:15-17 says, ***"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."***

- ✓ The 'grey hair' of prayerlessness (v. 7)

  This is usually the cause of all spiritual decline and the main evidence that the decline has set in. We become so busy that we don't have time to pray! Do we have this 'grey hair'?

- ✓ The 'grey hair' of worldliness (v. 8)

  A worldly believer is a person ***"Mixed … among the people"***. Remember what happened to Lot (Gen. 19) or Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). It is so easy to be unseparated from the world in our daily living.

- ✓ The 'grey hair' of unfruitful service (v. 9)

  Does real fruit result from our lives and service? ***"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain."*** (Jn. 15:16) Is our work empowered by the Holy Spirit or is it just done in the energy of the flesh? See Zech. 4:6, ***"Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."***

  There are other 'grey hairs' mentioned in this chapter – i.e. empty formalism (v. 11) or rebellion (v. 13). They are all indicative of spiritual decline.

  Sadly, we are blind to our own faults but others see them and so does God.

7. The People of God in Decay (ch. 8-10)

a. The repetition of a message given but unheeded

Hosea presented these messages over a period of many years. In all probability he was constantly fulfilling his duty as a prophetic 'warner' reasoning and pleading with all the different levels of society in the Northern Kingdom – pleading with them to return to the Lord their God. These chapters have two major characteristics:

i. They are equally relevant to the people of our day.

ii. Repetition helps to register a lasting impression, especially when we so clutter up our lives with extraneous things. In 2 Pet. 1:12 Peter tells the believers to whom he is writing, ***"Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth you have."*** We need constant reminders! Hosea reminds the people of the Northern Kingdom of their transgressions 24 times in this book. He reminds them of their rebellion against the law, their sin, their moral and spiritual failure and their iniquity (their inward corruption).

b. The people of the Northern Kingdom in moral and political decay

Moral decay leads to political decay. Hosea was one of the most discerning of the Old Testament prophets, yet in many ways he was also the most political of the prophets. His analysis of repentance is so good that little is added to it in the New Testament. Yet it is also a profound criticism of the society of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea had a great intellectual concept of God which completely exploded the idolatry that surrounded the Northern Kingdom and defined its political position in the Near East.

So often in our evangelical churches, our preaching lacks relevance because we don't have this dualistic approach. So in chapters 8-10 we see not so much about sin as about the inevitable consequences of sin in the public life of the nation.

c. Artificial gods and artificial kings (8:1-13)

Like a musical director, verse one begins with, ***"Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law." "They have broken My covenant"*** speaks of a broken relationship. ***"And they have rebelled against my law"*** speaks of broken regulations.

In verse 4, ***"They made kings, but not through Me. They set up princes, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction."*** The cause of such a state of dissipation is that there were no real leaders after the death of Jeroboam. Six different kings came and went in fairly quick succession by the transient impulse of one faction or another. These kings were not in any sense appointed by God, but were man-made and soon-to-be man-murdered.

Hosea, with sharp insight, likens the artificial gods to the artificial kings – all the work of man's hands. In 8:5-6 we can see a profound principle: ***"He*** (God) ***has spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? For it is from Israel a craftsman made it. It is not God!"*** The reality of deifying any creature – man or animal – makes way for its destruction. Galatians 6:7 says, ***"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever we sow, that will we also reap."*** This is similar to 8:7 ***"For they sow the wind and they shall reap a whirlwind."***

v. 12: ***"Were I to write for him My laws by the ten thousand, they would be regarded as a strange thing."*** God's revelation to us is completely comprehensive and more so for us than for the Old Testament people of God, since we have the life of the Lord Jesus before us and so we can see what God is really like. He has also given us His Holy Spirit to be our companion God. The sheer wonder of God's comprehensive revelation of His will for us is amazing, but not only has He revealed His will, He has given us His power to do it and along with this, He cares for us!

v. 14 is a great summary of chapter 8: ***"For Israel has forgotten His maker and built palaces and Judah has multiplied fortified cities. So I will send fire upon her cities and it shall devour her strongholds."***

The consequence will be that their enemies will swallow up the nation of the Northern Kingdom and take away all the people as slaves. Many people were killed by the Assyrians and many more were taken away as captives. Their houses and lands were largely destroyed and thorns would grow in the fields.

What is the basic reason for God's judgement? Amos 3:2 says ***"You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."*** Hosea says the same thing in 11:1, 4 and 12:14.

The character of God makes it impossible for Him to let sin go unpunished. See Hosea 12:2. His goal is to make a "holy nation". God's judgements are always disciplinary. He has a purpose in view in all His judgements. It is to encourage us to repent. Hosea tearfully predicted what would happen to the Northern Kingdom:

- It would involve bloody fighting: ***"I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel"*** (1:5)
- It would involve exile from their homeland: ***"I will utterly take them away."*** (1:6; 9:3; 9:17)
- It would leave them completely disowned: ***"I will not be your God."*** (1:9)
- Bewilderment and frustration would be their lot. ***"She shall not find her paths. I will cause all her mirth to cease."*** (2:6, 11)
- Drought and famine would rob the Northern Kingdom of its wealth. (2:12)
- The leadership of the nation would be removed: ***"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king and without princes, without a sacrifice, without a pillar, without an ephod and without a teraphim*** (household gods)***."*** (3:4)
- Satisfaction would be lost: ***"The floor and the winepress shall not feed them and the new wine shall fail her."*** (4:10)

- Fire would eat up their cities and great buildings. It is a picture of a "scorched earth" or like Hiroshima.
- Disgrace and humiliation would be heaped upon them. (10:5-6; 11:6)
- The king would be killed: ***"At dawn the King of Israel shall be utterly cut off."*** (10:15) ***"Samaria's king shall perish …."*** (10:7)
- They would be subject to foreign powers: ***"Assyria shall be their king."*** (11:5)
- Terrible atrocities will occur. ***"Their little ones shall be dashed in pieces and their pregnant women ripped open."*** (10:14)

d. The effects of the exile (9:10-17)

Tragedy has often knocked abruptly at the doors of gaiety and revelry as at the sacrilegious feast of Belshazzar in Daniel 5 or perhaps in the sinking of the Titanic.

The people of the Northern Kingdom are in exile in the Assyrian Empire based in its capital Nineveh. (The ruins of Nineveh are still visible just on the other side of the Tigris River from the city of Mosul.) They were almost certainly slaves – no joy, no pleasure, no more enjoying the feasts of Ba'alim.

The principle on a national scale is that sin leads to growing anarchy and this leads to judgement. The captivity they were experiencing was symbolic of "a return to Egypt". It was redemption <u>out</u> of Egypt that made them the People of God. Now, as we have seen, God called them, ***"not my people"***. It was a loss of freedom and reduction to a state of slavery.

We read, ***"It shall be like mourners' bread to them and all who eat it shall be defiled, for their bread shall be for their hunger only …."*** The food of the mourner is rarely enjoyed. It is never satisfying. He eats because necessity drives him. This is an obvious characteristic of an unspiritual person attempting to do something for God when his heart is not in it.

e. The corruption that comes through lust (9:10-17)

Those promoting relativity in morals today forget how frequently the human race has attempted this experience in the past. The result has always been the same. First comes weariness, then decay and finally destitution. In ancient Egypt ~2500 B.C. an Egyptian made a collection of proverbs called the Proverbs of Ptah-Hotep. (The Exodus happened ~1250 B.C.) He says this about immoral acts:

"There is no prudence in taking part in it and thousands of men destroy themselves in order to enjoy the moment, brief as a dream, while they gain death so as to know it. It is villainous that of a man who excites himself; if he goes on to carry it out, he abandons his mind. For as for him who is without repugnance for such acts, there is no good sense at all in him".

This was the experience of Egypt and Persia. It was characteristic of the languor of the Greek city states. Deep weariness and satiated lust was characteristic of much of Imperial Rome. So often you can see in history that the wages of frivolity is destruction!

<u>But there is a way of escape</u>! ***"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."*** (2 Pet. 1:3-4) The greatness of Hosea is that he felt the vices of his day in his society, but he preached repentance and pardon. So he believed in the possibility of living a holy life even for his deprived generation.

C.H. Spurgeon wrote: *"When the divine wrath has begun to burn, it rises, so to speak, by degrees. And God commonly proceeds by beginning at what is most external to us, whose loss we won't deeply feel, but ever advances further towards that which is dearer and of more impact, until at last God strikes at our very selves. If God is not gracious towards us, then He is angry. He can sustain no intermediate state."*

f. Puppet kings and puppet gods (10:1-8)

"Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built …." (10:1) The fact was that the more wealthy they became, the less they worshipped God.

The more substances they possessed, the less submission there was to the laws of God. The deceitfulness of riches drowned their devotion to God.

In his commentary, Matthew Henry says of this passage, *"What we do not rightly employ we may justly expect to be emptied of. It is a great affront to God and a great abuse of His goodness when, the more mercies we receive from Him, the more sins we commit against Him!"*

- 10:2 – ***"Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt."*** It is the state of our hearts that is the source of evil. As long as our hearts do not belong to Him, so long we will rob Him of what is His own. God longs to have our hearts as His alone. He allows none to share His possession.
- 10:5-6 – ***"The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-Aven*** (an idol). ***Its people mourn for it and so do the idolatrous priests … for it has departed*** (into exile) ***from them."*** It was carried off to Assyria. The sad fact is that without the grace of God working in our hearts we will mourn, not over our sin, but over our idols!
- 10:8 – ***"The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorns and thistles shall grow on their altars and they will say to the mountains, 'Cover us' and to the hills, 'Fall on us'."***

  Surely, it is infinitely better to pray to the Lord Jesus now to cover our transgressions with the blood of His Atonement rather than, through the neglect of this, to cry out to the mountains at the last, "Fall on us and cover us". Our prayer to the Lord Jesus, if offered in faith now, will be heard. But praying to the mountains will always be in vain.

  If the things we affirm in our creeds are true, we ought to be on fire with joy. Trying to stimulate joy and enthusiasm is useless. If we have lost our flame of love for God, our fire to do His will under any circumstance against evil, it is because we have lost our vision of God and we have lost our sense the greatness of the Gospel. Read again Hebrews 12:12-29.

8. The Heart and Holiness of God (ch. 11)

In chapters 11-13 we reach the climax of Hosea's message to his people. Sadly, in 11:5 we see that the people of the Northern Kingdom are still refusing to return to God. In 11:1-5 we have two pictures of God's love for His people.

a. The Love of God shown in the love of a parent with all the patience of a parent (v: 1-3)

"Before he was born, I began to love him." (v. 1) and, ***"Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk."*** (v. 3) Here is a picture of a father teaching his child to walk.

In 1 Jn. 3:1 we read, ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called 'the children of God' and so we are."*** It is a great privilege to be called a child of God, but remember that this also implies coming under our Father's discipline.

The Lord Jesus modelled this for us, ***"My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me"***. We also remember Him saying, ***"It is written …."*** and ***"Get behind me, Satan"***. It was said of the Lord Jesus, ***"No deceit was found in His mouth."***

<u>Walking needs teaching</u>. See Jer. 10:23-24: ***"I know, O Lord, that the way of a man is not in himself, that it is not in a man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O Lord, but in justice, not in anger …."***

b. The Love of God shown in the love of a husband (v. 4)

We can see the power of love to draw – the mention of ***"chords of kindness, with the bands of love"***. Love and law are linked in the mind of God. Parents sometimes have a choice. Do we want happy responsible children or children like plodding cattle dragging along life's burdens? If we don't focus on duty without love, our children will find life hard. It is true that usually work is a discipline, but we all need lots of encouragement, sympathy and love. This is the picture in this verse.

c. A picture of the justice of God (v. 6-9)

I think this is the greatest passage in Hosea! God's love does not stand against God's justice. Calvary is where love and justice meet. God has shown us what these people in the Northern Kingdom deserve – annihilation – complete wiping out of them all. We would probably think that God should give up on them and abandon them! But God says, ***"How can I do this? My heart***

recoils within Me; My compassion grows warm and tender." In verse 9 God says 3 times, ***"I will not."*** God resolved the issue at Calvary!

9. **The Blessedness of Surrender to God's will** (ch. 14)

   a. **The Climatic Appeal** (v. 4):

   "I will love them freely." This is an unusual ending to an Old Testament book.

   - Genesis ends with a coffin in Egypt. (Gen. 50:26)
   - The story of the Exodus from Egypt ends in Deut. 34:10. Moses died and we read, ***"And there has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face-to-face."*** Again in v. 12 we read, ***"For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."***
   - Joshua ends with, ***"After these things Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died being 110 years old."*** (Josh. 24:29)
   - Judges 21:25 says at the end of the book, ***"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."***
   - At the end of 2 Sam. 24, King David had to choose what sort of punishment should come to the land because of his sin (v. 10-25).
   - In 2 Kings 25:7 King Zedekiah was captured. Jerusalem was looted and he and others were taken to Babylon in chains and there he was blinded.
   - In Jer. 52 the Fall of Jerusalem is recorded with 4600 people taken away into slavery.

   But Hosea has a happy ending! Out of Hosea's own heartbreak concerning Gomer, he gives us a marvellous insight to consider the deathless love of God. He shows us the devastation caused by sin, the judgement that is inevitable for those who ignore God and go their own way and God's patient seeking and rescue of His people. For the essence of God's nature is not justice but love.

   I think the rainbow around the throne of God in Rev. 4:3 represents God's mercy. The rainbow of Noah's day was to signify that God would never again destroy the world with a flood. God agreed with Abraham that if there were ten righteous people found in Sodom, he would not destroy it. For us, Calvary is the greatest illustration of all.

   b. **God's Invitation to Return** (v. 1-2)

   "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord and say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept what is good … we will pay the vows of our lips. Assyria will not save us. … We will say no more 'Our God' to the works of our hands'."

   This is the confession God requires. They now had a solemn sense of their own sins. They say 'iniquity' and not 'mistakes' ('mistakes' is Satan's vocabulary).

   Is. 44:21-23 – ***"Remember these things O Jacob and Israel, for you are My servant I formed you. You are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a myth. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it. The Lord has redeemed Jacob and will be glorified in Israel."***

   The Lord wants to hear us praise Him! (Jn. 4:23 and Heb. 13:15) It was this sort of restoration that caused Gomer to sing!

   i. ***"Take to Him words."*** (v. 2) We are not to go to God empty, but at the same time we need to take nothing else – not imposing words or imposing solutions, but words showing our grief about ourselves and a longing for mercy.

   "I will praise the name of God with song. I will magnify Him with thanksgiving." (Ps. 69:30)

   ii. <u>Confession</u> (v. 5) ***"Assyria will not save us."*** Salvation doesn't originate in kings or in any others. ***"We will not ride on horses."*** In Ps. 124:2-3 we read, ***"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, then we would have been swallowed up alive …."*** Salvation is not in ourselves. Finally, it is not in false gods or in false religion.

c. The remedy for the disease of backsliding (v. 4)

"I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely." The simplicity here is really profound. This promise is very precious. God's love is lavished upon us – the constraining, overpowering, overwhelming love of God! Romans 5:7-8 in Phillips translation reads, ***"The proof of God's amazing love is this: it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died to save us."***

d. The Power of God to enrich our lives (v. 5-7)

i. A heaven-sent refreshing: ***"I will be like dew."***

- Dew falls at night just when we need it most.
- Dew falls silently. God's refreshment usually comes quietly.
- Dew is penetrative – leaving no stem or leaf dry.

ii. A heaven-sent vigour: ***"He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out … and His fragrance like Lebanon."***

iii. A heaven-sent beauty: ***"Blossom like a lily, beauty like an olive tree, fragrance like Lebanon."*** Holiness has a fragrant quality. Eph. 5:2 puts it like this, ***"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering to God."***

Again in 2 Cor. 2:14: ***"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in a triumphal procession and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere."***

iv. A heaven-sent fruitfulness: we are to flourish as a well-kept garden. As a vine, before we were unproductive – stunted and ugly. But now we are not limited to self-interest. When we touch other people's lives, it is with blessing – with revival.

Ps. 85:6 – ***"Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?"***

Hab. 3:2 – ***"In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known."***

e. Our Response and the Final Message of the Book of Hosea (14:8-9)

14:8 – ***"What have I to do with idols?"*** God will look after us! One glimpse of the Lord is enough!

Job 42:5-6 – ***"I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see You; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*** From our God comes His fruit. We are not sufficient in ourselves alone.

2 Cor. 3:5 – ***"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God who has made us competent …!"***

The Final Message of the Book of Hosea

Sin is a fall. Those of us who have fallen must get up again in repentance. God then restores us so we bloom in holiness, striking deep roots in truth and bringing forth fruit and fragrance for all around.

i. We have learned there are only two classes of people.

14:9 – "the just/wise" and "the transgressors"

All people everywhere can be divided into these two categories. This has been true since Adam's fall. In the Bible they are called:

- the righteous and the wicked (Ps. 37:32)
- the saved and the lost (Lk. 19:10)
- the believers and the unbelievers (Acts 28:24)
- sinners and saints (Rom. 1:7)

There are many vivid illustrations of this in the Bible:

- The story of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:4-5)
- Noah and his seven relatives who were in the Ark (2 Pet. 2:5)

To which class of people do we belong?

ii. We have learned what makes these two people different.

The "just" walk in the ways of the Lord, but the "transgressors" walk in their own ways. These two categories of people differ in the way they walk, the path they walk, the one for whom they walk and the destiny to which they walk.

iii. We have learned that God's way is right and man's way is wrong.

We are distinctly told that "the ways of the Lord" are right and man's ways are wrong. God's ways are not only right for God; they are right for all people. If we don't follow God's ways, we will end up disappointed, with despair heading to disaster. This is confirmed in Prov. 13:15 and Is. 1:28.

iv. We have been reminded about the character of God.

- He sees and knows our true state.
- He loves us and longs for us to return to Him so He can freely forgive us.
- He wants to heal us and restore us into fellowship with Himself.

v. We have been told about ourselves.

- We enjoy daily refreshment, daily growth and a deepening into the life of God.
- We exert a widening influence on those around us and our lives become ***"a sweet savour of Christ"***. (2 Cor. 2:15) Our lives are transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus and the Lord puts His beauty upon us. (See Ps. 90:1 and Ps. 149:4)
- We experience a complete change of heart and we find all our resources in the Lord Jesus Himself.

How very worthwhile it is for anyone to walk in the ways of the Lord! I think God's love for His people is perhaps the strongest argument against wrong living. Much more potent than the threat of punishment, is the very painful truth that when I sin, I am hurting God. To sin against His matchless love is to be ungrateful, selfish, disloyal and indifferent.

God says, ***"I desired mercy and not sacrifice."*** (6:6). 'Mercy' is an Old Testament word. New Testament words are "love" and "grace".

But there is more, God will deliver us from the habit of backsliding. Our hearts will be changed. (14:3 – we renounce our old ways for ever)

So for us, ***"It is time to seek the Lord."*** (10:12) The Book of Hosea has spoken to us about crucial issues like:

- The factors that influence national weakness and strength
- The importance of the quality of our home lives
- The dangers of compromise
- The importance of rightly understanding God's love
- The importance of detecting "the handwriting on the wall". Belshazzar saw handwriting on the wall indicating the impending collapse of a culture. (Dan. 5:1-30). Amos saw it as well. (Amos 3:8; 9:8) Hosea also saw it. (14:9)

"For behold, I will command and shake the house of Israel among the nations." (Amos 9:9)

Do we see and understand in our day?

POSTSCRIPT

A Comparison between Hosea's situation and ours in the UK

The State of the UK today

We are at the stage in our history when we increasingly live in a globalising world. Some US laws are being imported into EU law and vice versa. Canadian law is cited in legal cases in the UK. So we are moving into a globalised community. We need to ask ourselves what this will do to our culture.

There is no mention of God in the EU constitution. Rev. 13:1-10 gives us a frightening picture of people collectively united against God and increasingly we, His people, are affected in many ways by this. It is a world where our values as human beings are increasingly contradictory to God's laws.

The prospect of power is very appealing to world leaders like Donald Trump and many others. But, as Christians, we believe all governments are instituted by God. While we warmly applaud their attempts to control terrorism, we are aware that often the language used to fight terrorism is also the language that could bring in a new world order that would discriminate and harm many Christian believers. While many world leaders strongly condemn terrorism, they rarely condemned the ideology that is behind it!

The only world order we should welcome is the new world order instituted by the Lord Jesus when He returns in glory and that day will be a day of judgement for all the nations on earth. (see Amos 5:18-20)

We need to be careful not to idolise western democracy and the freedom it gives us. There are countries where less than £2 per head per annum is spent on healthcare. There are many countries where agriculture is mainly turned to producing cash crops to be sold in the west and where 50% of gross national product goes to service the national debt to western creditors. Many see that the current capitalism employed in the west (which is nominally Christian) actually depresses the economies of the world. But in many areas in the UK our society is failing. Is the writing on the wall?

Some recent traumas:

- The Grenfell Tower tragedy and cladding on numerous other tower blocks inspite of building regulations, health and safety precautions etc.
- Terrorist attacks
  - ✓ The Manchester Arena
  - ✓ Westminster Bridge
  - ✓ London Bridge station
  - ✓ Finsbury Park mosque
- Stabbings: 149 people were fatally stabbed in London alone in 2019. Of these 39 were under 25.
- Tim Farron has been under attack for his evangelical views resulting in his post-election resignation.

As we pray for our nation and for the world we need to realise that our prayers might be answered in an unexpected way. Perhaps the darkness will intensify. Insecurities and fears will increase. What will be the result? We, 'the people of light' will shine more brightly in the darkness.

Our situation will help us to identify in some way with the trauma Hosea prophetically saw that was coming to the state of his nation – the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Is this similar to many countries in the world today?

- North Korea
- Islamic State in the Near East and elsewhere – such as Al Qaeda – likely to proliferate internationally
- Civil War in South Sudan

- The Rohingya in Burma
- Floods in many parts of the world etc.

As the Lord Jesus loved the world, we are called to love people and respond to their deepest needs. As we do this, we realise that we too so often face the hatred and rejection of the world.

God's judgement often comes to the over-fed arrogant leaders who are doing nothing to help the poor and the needy.

Ezekiel 16 is a chapter about how sexual immorality – a major issue in our country – undermines a country. There are also economic sins that have infiltrated our lives and other western cultures far more subtly.

Western standards of freedom and democracy are not the most important standards by Biblical reckoning. The most important thing we can do both as a nation and globally in the western world is to earnestly repent and return to Biblical precepts and a Biblical worldview. **We diminish God's sovereignty if we deny God's involvement in today's current events.** With the slow decline of the rule of law and an increasing gap between the rich and the poor we need to be aware of the judgement to come.

The Bible often ascribes terrible acts of judgement to God's purposes. God can bring prosperity to a nation but He also allows disasters to happen, ***"I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create darkness. I, the Lord, do these things."*** (Is. 45:7) We read in Amos 3:6, ***"When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?"***

Jeremiah 18:1-8 speaks of Israel (the People of God) who were like clay in His hands. But God's actions were not arbitrary. So Israel's history is not arbitrary. It depends entirely on how they respond to God in history. If Israel turned from sin and changed her behaviour she would be spared judgement, but if she continued to rebel against God, she would be destroyed.

These same principles apply to any nation. See Ezekiel 14 and Amos 4. We can see that when empires come to an end, it is almost always as a consequence of how they behaved in terms of justice issues.