

The Minor Prophets

of the Old Testament

Introduction:

These twelve books of the Old Testament are named such due to the **size** of the prophecy as opposed to the ‘Major’ Prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. To be sure, there is nothing ‘minor’ about the **content** of these twelve books. These books provide valuable insight not only to the historical situation of Israel, but also to the teaching of Eschatology (*the doctrine of the Last Days*) with special emphasis on the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah.

Placement of the Books: (*canonization*)

(see *‘Divisions of the Old Testament’ study sheet*)

From the very earliest dates, the Hebrew Bible combines all twelve of these books into one book known as the “The Twelve.” This book of ‘The Twelve’ is included in the Hebrew division of Scripture known as the “*Nebhi'im*” or “the Prophets.” A Jew would summarize his entire Bible by the expression, “*the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45, etc.). On one occasion, the word “*psalms*” was also added to the phrase referring to the Hebrew Bible (Luke 24:44). Judaism classifies the Prophetic books as either the “**Former Prophets**” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles) or the “**Latter Prophets**” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve).

The individual books were produced in widely different periods of time. Among these books are some of the earliest and some of the latest of the Old Testament prophetic writings. *In neither the Hebrew nor Greek arrangement of the books within the collection have strict chronological considerations been followed.*

The twelve books come from four different periods. The earliest—**Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah**—appeared in the late ninth and early eighth centuries. This was the period prior to the rise of the great Assyrian empire. For that reason these three are sometimes called the pre-Assyrian prophets. The second three—**Amos, Hosea, Micah**—come from the eighth century, the period when the Assyrian armies were dominating the scene in the ancient Near East. The third triad—**Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk**—comes from the seventh century, when the power of the Assyrian empire faded rapidly and then was eclipsed by Babylon. The last three—**Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi**—come from the period after the exile when Judea was a province of the Persian Empire.

Arranged in the order they were written, the Book of the Twelve might look like this.

<i>Obadiah</i> <i>845 B.C.</i>	<i>Nahum</i> <i>650 B.C.</i>
<i>Joel</i> <i>835 B.C.</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i> <i>630 B.C.</i>
<i>Jonah</i> <i>755 B.C.</i>	<i>Habakkuk</i> <i>609 B.C.</i>

<i>Amos</i> <i>752 B.C.</i>	<i>Haggai</i> <i>520 B.C.</i>
<i>Micah</i> <i>735 B.C.</i>	<i>Zechariah</i> <i>480 B.C.</i>
<i>Hosea</i> <i>725 B.C.</i>	<i>Malachi</i> <i>432 B.C.</i>

Christ in the Books:

The most important question any student of the Bible can ask is, “*How is Christ portrayed in this passage or book?*” This is surely a solid foundation upon which to build your study. “*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself* (Luke 24:47).” {**Notice-** the ‘scriptures’ are equated with Christ ‘himself’ (John 1:14)}

The Lord Jesus is pictured in these twelve books as:

- ❖ The Second Moses, David & Israel (*Hosea*)
- ❖ The Teacher of Righteousness (*Joel*)
- ❖ Occupant of the Tent of David (*Amos*)
- ❖ Saviour and Judge Par Excellence (*Obadiah*)
- ❖ Resurrected Prophet (*Jonah*)
- ❖ Ruler from Bethlehem (*Micah*)
- ❖ Bringer of Good Tidings (*Nahum*)
- ❖ Conqueror of Satan (*Habakkuk*)
- ❖ Witness Against the Nations (*Zephaniah*)
- ❖ Desire of All Nations (*Haggai*)
- ❖ Enthroned Priest-King (*Zechariah*)
- ❖ Sun of Righteousness (*Malachi*)

Hosea

“Salvation”

Key Word- “Return”

Key Verse- 14:9

Summary of the Book-

Hosea brings his message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He is the prophet of the zero hour in the nation. What the weeping prophet Jeremiah was to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, nearly a century and a half later Hosea was to the Northern Kingdom.

It was through the troubles in Hosea's home that he reached the consciousness of his calling. Hosea married Gomer in good faith, but her unfaithfulness and ultimate enslavement broke his heart. Israel's apostasy was the counterpart of Gomer's adultery. It becomes very clear as we read the book that the first three chapters belong together and the remaining chapters belong together.

The story of Hosea's home life in the first three chapters sets the stage for our understanding of God's relationship with His people. The prophet, through the heartbreak of his own marriage, comes to see Israel's sin against God. Hosea represents God, our loving heavenly Father. Gomer represents the nation of Israel and the children represent the people of the nation. May God help us to see His love and our responsibility.

Outline of the Book

I. Hosea's Times (1:1)

II. Hosea's Experience: A Portrayal of God's Dealings with Israel (1:2-3:5)

- A. The symbolism of Hosea's family (1:2-2:1)
 - 1. Hosea's marriage: Israel's unfaithfulness (1:2-3a)
 - 2. Hosea's children: Israel's judgment (1:3b-9)
 - 3. The symbolism reversed (1:10-2:1)
- B. Restoration through punishment (2:2-23)
 - 1. The Lord's punishment of Israel (2:2-13)
 - 2. The Lord's restoration of Israel (2:14-23)
- C. The restoration of Hosea's marriage (chap. 3)
 - 1. The divine command (3:1)
 - 2. Hosea's obedient response (3:2-3)
 - 3. The illustration explained (3:4-5)

III. Hosea's Message: God's Judgment and Restoration of Israel (chaps. 4-14)

- A. The Lord's case against Israel (4:1-6:3)
 - 1. Israel's guilt exposed (chap. 4)
 - 2. Israel's judgment announced (5:1-14)
 - 3. Israel's restoration envisioned (5:15-6:3)
- B. The Lord's case against Israel expanded (6:4-11:11)
 - 1. Israel's guilt and punishment (6:4-8:14)
 - 2. Israel's guilt and punishment reiterated (9:1-11:7)

3. The Lord's compassion renewed (11:8-11)
- C. The Lord's case against Israel concluded (11:12-14:9)
 1. A concluding indictment (11:12-13:16)
 2. A concluding exhortation (chap. 14)

Symbolic Types in the Book

Hosea-	God the Father (Jehovah)
Gomer-	Adulterous Israel as a nation (corporately)
The Children-	The individual Israelites
Jezreel-	"God Sows" (<i>The Judgment of God upon the house of Jehu</i>)
Lo-ruhamah-	"Not Pitied"
Lo-ammi	"Not My People"

The place of the Covenant in the Book

The concept of a Covenant is found throughout the book of Hosea. One must have an understanding of covenant-based relationships in order to grasp the significance of Hosea's marital situation and the lesson it was supposed to teach. The God of Israel chose to reveal Himself to His people as Jehovah (I AM). This personal Name always carries with it the fact that "He is the Covenant-keeping God of Israel." The LORD (Jehovah) deals with man not in contracts, but in covenants.

Scripture records only TWO types of Covenants: **CONDITIONAL** and **UNCONDITIONAL**

In the case of a *Conditional Covenant*, both God and man have a respective role. The actions of one (man) will determine the actions of the other (God). Key words in the following order will enable the Bible student to identify a *Conditional Covenant* - "**IF**" and "**THEN**" (Deut. 28:1-2; 15).

However, when Scripture speaks of an *Unconditional Covenant*, it is made clear that God Himself (the Initiator) will keep the covenant with no regard to the actions of men. In an *Unconditional Covenant*, the responsibility of fulfillment rests solely on the LORD (Jehovah). In this arrangement, the key words are simply - "**I WILL**" (Genesis 12:2-3).

The book of Hosea uses the *Marriage Covenant* between Hosea and Gomer to illustrate the broken *Spiritual Covenant* between God and His people (Israel). Just as the Marriage Covenant was Conditional (if you are to enjoy intimacy there must be faithfulness and purity), so was Israel's covenant with her Husband (if the nation would serve Him only with undivided loyalty, it would experience blessing, safety and prosperity-Deut.28). Every promise of punishment upon Israel in this book was based upon the grounds of a broken covenant. God was not arbitrarily heaping chastisement upon the nation...they had failed in their obligation knowing well the consequences.

Expositional Commentary

Hosea's Times (1:1)

1:1. In Hebrew the name Hosea ("salvation") is the same as Hoshea, Israel's last king (2 Kings 17:1). Hoshea was also Joshua's original name (Num. 13:8, 16). Nothing is known of Hosea's family background except that he was a son of Beerī.

Hosea's ministry extended for a number of decades in the second half of the eighth century B.C. Four kings of Judah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah) reigned when Hosea prophesied. Only one king of the north (Jeroboam II), is mentioned though Hosea's message was directed primarily to the Northern Kingdom. Six kings of Israel followed Jeroboam II during the reigns of the four Judean kings mentioned. Perhaps Hosea omitted those six to point up the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty in Judah.

Hosea's Experience: A Portrayal of God's Dealings with Israel (1:2-3:5)

The message of the first three chapters (and of the entire book) oscillates between judgment and salvation. Hosea's marital experiences, which included the heartbreak caused by his wife's unfaithfulness and the joy of their renewed relationship, provide the framework for this message.

The symbolism of Hosea's family

This opening section sets forth the major themes of the entire prophecy: Israel's unfaithfulness, the certainty of judgment, and the ultimate restoration of the nation. These ideas are introduced within the context of the Lord's command to Hosea to marry and have children.

At the outset of Hosea's ministry the LORD instructed him to marry an adulterous woman. This relationship, characterized by infidelity on the wife's part, was to portray Israel's unfaithfulness to its covenant with the Lord (cf. 2:2-23). In response to the divine command Hosea... took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim.

Much debate has centered on the circumstances of Hosea's marriage. Some have held that the marriage was only visionary or allegorical, not literal. This proposal was motivated by a desire to sidestep the supposed moral difficulty of the holy God commanding His servant to marry a woman of disreputable character. However, the account is presented as a straightforward narrative, not as a report of a vision or as a purely symbolic act (cf. chap. 3). The Lord sometimes required His prophets to carry out orders that many would consider over and above the call of duty (e.g., Isa. 20:1-4; Ezek. 4:1-5:4).

Hosea's children to serve as symbols of coming punishment

The divinely chosen names for Hosea's three children served as reminders of the broken relationship between the Lord and Israel and pointed ahead to judgment. Each section on the children (vv. 3b-5, 6-7, 8-9) contains a birth notice (vv. 3b, 6a, 8), a divine word of instruction concerning the child's name (vv. 4a, 6b, 9a), and an explanation of the meaning of the name (vv. 4b-5, 6b, 9b). God's words (v. 7) are unique in that they qualify the announcement of judgment given (v. 6).

❖ Jezreel (1:3-5)

The first child (a son) was named Jezreel. At this point the significance of his name was not in its meaning (“God sows”), but in its association with past and future events at the place Jezreel (cf., however, v. 11; 2:22-23). Jezreel was the site of Jehu’s ruthless massacre of the house of Ahab (1:4; cf. 2 Kings 9-10). In the future it would be the scene of Israel’s military demise (Hosea 1:5).

The reason for the Lord’s coming punishment on Jehu’s dynasty (lit., house) was the massacre (lit., “bloodshed”) at Jezreel (ca. 841 B.C.). Jehu’s slaughter of Jezebel and Ahab’s descendants had been prophesied by Elijah (1 Kings 21:21-24), commanded by Elisha (2 Kings 9:6-10), and commended by the Lord Himself (2 Kings 10:30). So many think the attitude expressed by the Lord (Hosea 1:4) contradicted that in the accounts in 1 and 2 Kings. But a closer examination of the historical record suggests a resolution to the problem. Jehu also killed Joram (2 Kings 9:24), Ahaziah, king of Judah (2 Kings 9:27-28), 42 of Ahaziah’s relatives (2 Kings 10:12-14), and several functionaries of the Baal cult (2 Kings 10:18-28). Though the execution of Baal’s servants was certainly in accord with the Lord’s will (cf. 1 Kings 18:40), Jehu’s attack on the house of David went too far. Despite the fact that Ahaziah’s assassination could be attributed to God’s providence (2 Chron. 22:7), it demonstrated an underlying lack of regard for the Lord’s commands. This disregard subsequently came to the surface in other ways (cf. 2 Kings 10:29-31). So Hosea 1:4 probably refers to the slaughter of Ahaziah and his relatives. Though their deaths did not actually occur in Jezreel (cf. 2 Kings 9:27; 10:12-14), they were associated with the wholesale slaughter at that place.

The fulfillment of this prophecy came in 752 B.C. when Shallum assassinated Zechariah, the fourth of Jehu’s descendants to rule the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 15:10), thereby cutting off Jehu’s dynasty forever.

God told Hosea that the demise of Jehu’s dynasty was to be accompanied by the downfall of the Northern Kingdom. In a display of poetic justice the Lord would break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel, the site of Jehu’s sin. Breaking the bow refers to the destruction of the nation’s military might (cf. 1 Sam. 2:4; Ps. 46:9; Jer. 49:35).

The general fulfillment of this prophecy came in 734-722 B.C. when the Assyrians overran Israel and reduced it to a province within their empire (2 Kings 15:29; 17:3-5). The Jezreel plain in particular was probably conquered in 733 B.C. by Tiglath-Pileser III. This valley, which had been the scene of a great military victory under Gideon (Jud. 6:33; 7), again became a symbol of national disgrace and defeat, as it had been after Saul’s death (1 Sam. 29:1, 11; 31).

*****Christian Life Application*****

Even though it was God’s will to judge the house of Ahab by the hand of Jehu, God saw that Jehu’s heart was not right toward his victims. Jehu desired vengeance and harbored unholy motives during the conquests of his life. A parallel account is found in the book of Habakkuk. Israel’s sin deserved judgment and God revealed to Habakkuk that He had destined Babylon to execute this judgment by carrying Israel away captive. However, God further reveals that He will also judge the Babylonians for the wickedness and fierceness of their heart. We could further consider the bondage of the Jews in Egypt. God foretold of the Egyptian bondage that would last 400 years because of Israel’s lack of faith in fleeing the land of promise during famine. As in the other cases, God also judged Egypt for the evil of their ways and their gross idolatry. No man can take satisfaction in oppressing God’s people by asserting that he is being used as an instrument of God (Hitler, Roman Catholic Church against Jews, etc.). *As Christians we must recognize that even while God may use us to fulfill His purposes in this world by reproofing it of sin and warning of future judgment, we must seek to keep our hearts right and walk before Him in humility. {Matt.26:24; Prov.24:17-18}*

❖ **Lo-Ruhamah: “Not loved” (1:6-7)**

The second child received the name Lo-Ruhamah, which means “she is not loved.” Her name indicated that the Lord’s love for Israel would be cut off for a time. “Ruhamah,” from the verb *rāḥam*, describes tender feelings of compassion, such as those expressed by a parent for a child (cf. 1 Kings 3:26; Ps. 103:13; Isa. 49:15) or by a man for his younger brother (cf. Gen. 43:30). At Sinai the Lord described Himself (Ex. 34:6) as “merciful and gracious” (*’ēl raḥûm*) who is willing to forgive iniquity (Ex. 34:6). However, despite His gracious character, times come when He will no longer “clear the guilty” (Ex. 34:7). Such a time had come for the Northern Kingdom.

The light of God’s grace shines through the gloom of impending judgment. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in contrast with Israel, would experience the Lord’s love in the form of deliverance from the Assyrians. This would not be accomplished through human military might (symbolized by the bow, sword, etc.), but by the Lord’s intervention. **This promise was fulfilled in 701 B.C. when God supernaturally annihilated 185,000 soldiers in the powerful Assyrian army in one night thereby ending its campaign against Judah (2 Kings 19:32-36).**

❖ **Lo-Ammi: “Not My people” (1:8-9)**

The third child, a son, was named Lo-Ammi, which means “not My people.” In the ancient covenant formula God declared, “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Lev. 26:12; cf. Ex. 6:7; Deut. 26:17-18). But now that relationship was to be severed. The last clause of Hosea 1:9 (I will not be your God) is literally, “**and I [am] not I AM (’ehyeh) to you.**” The statement probably alludes to God’s words to Moses, “*I AM (’ehyeh) THAT I AM (’ehyeh): and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM (’ehyeh) hath sent me unto you*” (Ex. 3:14). “I AM,” which is closely related to the divine name Yahweh, points to God as the covenant LORD of Israel who watches over and delivers His people (cf. Ex. 3:16-17). However, through Lo-Ammi the Lord announced that Israel would no longer experience His special saving presence.

The renewed promise of future blessing – “In wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2)

Immediately after pronouncing judgment, the Lord quickly reminds His covenant people of their future blessing. This is typical throughout the Old Testament; Jehovah foretells of His judgment upon Israel’s sins but quickly reminds them that He has not cast them off forever...***He remains faithful even when they are unfaithful*** (Romans 11:1-5).

Consider the ***five-fold*** blessing God promises His adulterous wife: (*Hosea 1:10-2:1*)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1) National increase (v.10a) | <i>“the number...shall be as the sand of the sea”</i> |
| 2) National conversion (v.10b) | <i>“it shall be said...Ye are the sons of the living God”</i> |
| 3) National reunion (v.11a) | <i>“the children of Judah and Israel...be gathered together”</i> |
| 4) National leadership (v.11b) | <i>“and appoint themselves one head”</i> |
| 5) National restoration (v.2:1) | <i>“say unto your brethren...Ammi...Ruhamah”</i> |

These five blessings are identical to the promises made earlier to Abraham (Gen.12) and David (2 Sam.7). God is not giving a new set of promises, He is simply reminding them of what they already knew but had neglected.

****Christian Life Application****

God’s people need a daily exposure to Scripture to remind them of what they already know, but have forgotten. Namely, that God will judge sin without partiality and that He will also forgive and restore those who have a truly repentant heart. It is very often the “old” truths that prove the greatest blessing to God’s people (2 Peter 1:12-13).

The judgment of a jealous husband – “He is a jealous God” (Joshua 24:19)

In chapter two we find the Lord clearly detailing the specific judgments He would bring upon the Northern Kingdom for “her” spiritual adultery (idolatry).

We find God here speaking as the Husband first to the individual children, not the mother. We must remember the children represent the individual Jews of the land whereas the wife (Gomer) represents the land corporately as a whole. The second verse seems to be a message ***TO*** the mother ***FROM*** the father ***BY WAY OF*** the children. The message here is highly symbolic. God is appealing to individual Jews to stand up and confront their own nation with its sins. Jehovah is looking for a few who have remained faithful to His Name to be His messengers to His beloved, albeit unfaithful wife. This too is God’s plan for all ages. What the Old Testament prophets were to Israel, so now are the New Testament pastors and teachers. God is still calling faithful children to “plead” with the wicked that they turn from their ways and return to the Father (Isaiah 58:1).

The children were to plead with their mother to: 1) put her whoredoms out of her sight and 2) take her adulteries from between her breasts. These two phrases speak to the fact that Israel had become fully engrossed in idolatry...her gaze (sight) is upon a false god and her heart (breasts) is upon a false god. At any time he could have exercised his right to execute her (Lev.20:10).

Notice carefully the punishments God would inflict upon her if she refused to return to Him-

- ❖ “lest I strip her naked” (2:3) (*Compare Ezekiel 16:37-38*)
- ❖ “make her as a wilderness”
- ❖ “set her like a dry land”
- ❖ “slay her with thirst”

These punishments become significant when you realize the concept of Baal-worship. Baal “lord” was worshipped and prayed to for primarily two things- 1) agricultural abundance and 2) human fertility. God strikes a death-blow to Baal’s ‘power’ by inflicting these specific punishments.

Her children are rebuked in verse four for their “whoredoms.” The reason for this is obvious- if a nation becomes idolatrous it is simply because the people of the nation are idolaters. The sinfulness of the mother has been transmitted to the children and they will reap the consequences.

Gomer's misplaced affection

Sin always blinds. It blinds the mind to reason and the heart to affection. Gomer is completely fooled by her own adultery. Notice her statement concerning how her needs are to be met (2:5). She has trusted her “lovers” for three primary things:

- ❖ “my bread and my water” (Necessity of Food)
- ❖ “my wool and my flax” (Necessity of Clothing)
- ❖ “mine oil and my drink(wine)” (Luxuries)

She had become so irrational that she attributed these gifts to an idol which could neither see nor hear! Israel withheld praise from the One who deserved it (Deut. 7:12-13; 26:10). It is becoming more obvious as to why God’s righteous anger was so kindled against His beloved.

In order to expose Baal’s impotence and inability to save, Jehovah hedges up Gomer’s way and then sets her on a “chase” for her lovers. We see her in verse seven following hard after but never overtaking those she thought loved her and provided for her. Such is the case today. Men and women give themselves and their strength to a world they thought cared for them only to realize in the end that the world always proves to be unfaithful. Upon realizing the futility of continuing to serve Baal, she makes a vow to return to her husband. This resolution sounds much like that of the Prodigal Son. In both cases the wayward one has to “come to themselves” before they would “come back to the father.” Every prodigal in the world would run back home if he would only seriously consider how good it was in the father’s house.

The heartbreaking reality

In verse eight we see that even in her disobedience, her loving Husband had provided for her and would not allow her to go without. Consider what he gave to her while she was returning no love to him- **“corn and wine and oil”** and **“multiplied her silver and gold.”** Notice carefully that only one of these items is a necessity for life-- corn. The rest are for pleasure and luxury. **It is a fearful and dangerous practice to use the gifts of God (financial, health, abilities and talents) to serve Baal (the world, the flesh and the devil) as did Gomer in verse eight.** The goodness of God causes Him to not only supply the necessities of His people but He also delights in providing the luxuries (John 2:1-20). This truth becomes even more beautiful when we consider that He gives us all these things in the midst of our unfaithfulness to Him.

*****Christian Life Application*****

Can any of us deny the fact of God’s faithfulness to us even in the midst of our unfaithfulness to Him? Even the lost sinner enjoys God’s goodness although he does not give God the praise. We must beware lest we ever become arrogant in thinking we have “done well for ourselves.” In truth- every good thing we have comes from above. It should break our hearts to consider the goodness of God toward us compared to our cruelty toward Him (Romans 2:4).

The promise of chastisement continued

(2:9b-10) The figurative portrayal of Israel as the Lord's wife is carried along in these verses. Without wool and linen (cf. v. 5), which were used to make clothing (Lev. 13:47, 59; Deut. 22:11; Prov. 31:13; Ezek. 44:17), she would have no means of covering her nakedness. Through this deprivation the Lord would expose her lewdness. Her shameful behavior would become known to all through this public demonstration (cf. Hosea 2:3; Ezek. 16:36-37). "Lewdness" (*nablūt*, which occurs only here in the OT) refers to a blatant breach of covenant which disgraces the entire community. A related term (*neḥālāh*) is used of Achan's sin (Josh. 7:15), as well as various prohibited sexual acts, including fornication (Deut. 22:21), incest (2 Sam. 13:12), rape (Jud. 19:23; 20:6), and adultery (Jer. 29:23). During this exhibition Israel's lovers would be forced to stand by helplessly, being unable to deliver her from the Lord's powerful grip. Then the Lord's superiority and the lovers' weakness (or apathy) would become apparent to her.

(2:11) The coming judgment would also bring the cessation of Israel's joyous religious celebrations, including the great yearly festivals (Ex. 23:14-17), the monthly New Moons (i.e., New Moon sacrifices; Num. 10:10, 28:11-15), and the weekly Sabbath observances. These feasts had been corrupted by Baal worship (cf. Hosea 2:13) and were no longer desired by the Lord.

(2:12-13) The themes in verses 5-9 are repeated in verses 12-13. In implementing the covenant curses the Lord would destroy the produce (her vines and her fig trees; cf. Deut. 28:38-42; Joel 1:7; Amos 4:9), which Israel erroneously regarded as the pay given by her lovers in exchange for her services (cf. Hosea 9:1; Micah 1:7). The vineyards would be reduced to an overgrown thicket inhabited by wild animals. This would be an effect of the depopulation which would accompany the nation's military defeat and exile (cf. Ps. 80:12-13; Isa. 5:5-6; 7:23-25; 17:9; 32:9-14; Micah 3:12).

In burning incense to the Baals (them), Israel had, as it were, seductively chased after her lovers (cf. Hosea 2:5). The rings and jewelry, though sources of delight and signs of prestige in the proper context (cf. Prov. 25:12; Ezek. 16:12-14), here represent the unfaithful wife's efforts to attract her lovers. The plural "Baals" (cf. also Hosea 2:17; 11:2; Jud. 2:11; 1 Sam. 7:4; Jer. 2:23; 9:14) in this context probably refer to various local manifestations of the one Canaanite deity (cf. the singular Baal in Hosea 2:8; 13:1), who was represented by images in Baal shrines scattered throughout the land (cf. 13:1-2). The plurality of idols naturally suggested the comparison to many lovers.

The final statement in this section (2:2-13) summarizes Israel's basic sin and the reason for the coming judgment: she had forgotten (*šākah*) the LORD. **The verb here does not refer to a mental lapse or loss of knowledge; it describes a refusal to acknowledge the Lord's goodness and authority (cf. 8:14; 13:6).** Moses had repeatedly urged the nation not to forget the Lord's gracious deeds (Deut. 4:9; 8:11) and His demand for exclusive worship (Deut. 4:23; 6:12; 8:19; cf. 2 Kings 17:38). However, in fulfillment of Moses' prediction (cf. Deut. 31:27-29 with Deut. 32:18) Israel throughout her history forgot the Lord and worshiped false gods (cf. Jud. 3:7; 1 Sam. 12:9-10; Ps. 78:9-11; Jer. 23:27).

The promise of restoration after judgment

(2:14-23) Having brought Israel to a place of desperation (*wilderness*) in which she would again look to Him (cf. v. 7), the Lord said He would take the next steps in restoring the relationship. Israel's positive response would lead to covenant renewal and blessing.

(2:14) In these verses the Lord described His overtures of love and Israel's future positive response. The Lord promised to initiate reconciliation with His wayward wife by alluring her. **Allure** refers here to tender, even seductive, speech. Elsewhere the term describes a man's seduction of a virgin (Ex. 22:16) and a lover's attempt to entice a man (Samson) into divulging confidential information (Jud. 14:15; 16:5). The Lord said He **will lead Israel into the wilderness**, where she will be completely separated from past lovers and will be able to concentrate totally on His advances. The reference to the desert recalls Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus. This was sometimes pictured as a time when Israel experienced the Lord's care in a special way (cf. Hosea 13:5) and when she, in return, loved Him with the devotion of a new bride (Jer. 2:2-3). The allusion to the wilderness also represents a remarkable reversal in the use of the desert motif in this chapter. *For the Lord had threatened to make Israel "like a dry land" (Hosea 2:3).* According to verse 14 the desert will become the site of His romantic overtures to her. There He will **speak comfortably (tenderly) to her** (lit., "speak to her heart"; cf. Isa. 40:2). This Hebrew idiom refers to gentle, encouraging words, such as a man speaks to his desired bride (cf. Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13). *It is in this daring kind of portrayal that the passion of God becomes visible—a passion that does not hesitate at any condescension or hold back from any act for the sake of the beloved elect.*

(2:15) When the Lord leads Israel out of the desert back into the Promised Land, He will restore her vineyards. When Israel enters the land she will again pass through the **Valley of Achor** (lit., "**Valley of Trouble**"), the site of Achan's heinous sin which jeopardized the success of the Conquest (Josh. 7). However, this time the valley will be a symbol of better things to come, a **door of hope** leading to repossession of the Promised Land (cf. Isa. 65:10). The effects of the trouble caused by Israel's past unfaithfulness will have disappeared. Instead she will respond favorably to the Lord as in the days immediately after the Exodus (cf. Jer. 2:2). Admittedly this earlier period is idealized here, as even a cursory reading of the narratives in Exodus and Numbers reveals.

(2:16-17) In that day, when Israel is restored to the land, she will acknowledge the **LORD as her husband**. She will address Him as *'išî*, my Husband, rather than *ba' āli*, my Master. The word *ba'al* would be a reminder of Israel's former Baal worship. Therefore God will prohibit its use, and Israel will no longer use the names of the Baals (cf. the pl. Baalim or "Baals" in Hosea 2:13; 11:2).

(2:18) Israel's return to the land will be accompanied by peace. The Lord will mediate a covenant between the nation and the animal kingdom. The harmful beasts of the field, which had earlier devoured the vines and fig trees (v. 12; cf. Lev. 26:22), will no longer be hostile (cf. Ezek. 34:25). Isaiah also portrayed the Kingdom Age as one of harmony between man and animals (Isa. 11:6-8; 65:25). The Lord will also cause war (symbolized by bow and sword and battle; cf. Hosea 1:7) to cease in the land of Israel. The nation will dwell safely, free from the threat of foreign invasion. This marks the reversal of an earlier judgment (cf. 1:5) and the return of covenant blessing (cf. Lev. 26:5-6, where the same expressions, "lie down" and "safely" are used).

(2:19-20) The restoration of the Lord's marriage to Israel is described in terms of a betrothal. The word 'betroth' marks a new beginning, with all the freshness of first love, rather than the weary patching up of differences. It will be as though the Lord and Israel had returned to the days of courtship. Betrothal in ancient Israel was much more binding than engagement is in contemporary Western society. The Law treated a betrothed couple as though they were legally married (Deut. 20:7; 22:23-24). At the time of the betrothal the man would pay a price to seal the agreement (cf. 2 Sam. 3:14). The Lord's price will consist of **righteousness... judgment ... lovingkindness... mercy, and faithfulness.** These qualities will characterize His relationship with Israel, which will never again be disrupted (cf. Hosea 2:19). "Righteousness" (*šedeq*) and "judgment" (*mišpāt*) refer here to the maintenance of Israel's just cause, which includes vindication through deliverance. "Lovingkindness" (*hesed*) is an unswerving devotion which fulfills the responsibilities arising from a relationship. "Mercies" (*raḥmîm*, related to *rāḥam*, used in 1:6-7; 2:1, 4) is tender feeling which motivates one to gracious action. "Faithfulness" (*'ēmûnâh*) implies dependability and constant loyalty. In response to the divine love showered on her, Israel **shall know the LORD.** In contrast with her former tendency to forget (cf. v. 13) she will recognize His authority by demonstrating loyalty to Him. "Know" (*yāda'*) often occurs in covenantal contexts with the sense of "recognize." For example, the Lord recognized (lit., "knew") Israel's special relationship to Him (cf. Amos 3:2). Israel in return was to recognize (lit., "know") only the authority of her Lord (cf. Hosea 13:4). In Hebrew thought, such recognition was not a mere mental exercise; it implied action (cf. Jer. 22:16). In Israel's case it meant obedience to the Lord's commandments (cf. Hosea 8:1-2). In the future all Israel will "know" the Lord because, as Jeremiah wrote, He will put His "Law in their inward parts (mind) and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). This is the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), which corresponds to the new marriage pictured in Hosea 2:19-20.

(2:21-22) The promise of restored agricultural blessing, mentioned briefly in verse 15, is expanded here. A series of cries and responses is envisioned as different elements of the natural world are personified. Jezreel (*the nation of Israel here*) will cry out to the corn, wine, and oil. They in turn will respond by calling to the earth from which they are produced. The earth in turn will look to the heavens, the source of the rain which makes the soil productive. The heavens will then call to the Lord, the One who ultimately controls the agricultural cycle. He will respond by providing the rain necessary for agricultural prosperity.

(2:23) The Lord Himself is pictured as engaging in agricultural endeavors. He will plant Israel in the land, where she will grow under His protective care. The nation called Lo-Ruhamah (not ... loved; cf. 1:6) and Lo-Ammi (not My people; cf. 1:9) will experience God's compassion and will be addressed as His people. They will acknowledge that He, not Baal, is their God. This passage is parallel to 1:10-2:1, where the same reversal in the significance of the symbolic names is seen.

Hosea 2:23, along with 1:10, is quoted in Romans 9:25-26 and 1 Peter 2:10. Paul quoted those Hosea passages to say that both Jews and Gentiles will be converted during the Church Age (cf. Rom. 9:24). This does *not* mean, however, that he equated the Gentiles with Israel and regarded the conversion of Gentiles as a direct fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy. Paul clearly taught that national Israel would be saved as well (Rom. 11). Rather, Paul extracted from Hosea's prophecy a **principle** concerning God's gracious activity.

According to Hosea, *God will mercifully bring a previously rejected people into a relationship with Himself.* Paul recognized this same pattern in God's dealings with the Gentiles. In Romans 9:25 Paul, then, was applying Hosea 2:23 to the Gentiles; he was not reinterpreting the verse. Likewise Peter (1 Peter 2:10) saw the language of Hosea's prophecy as applicable to New Testament believers, who by divine mercy have been brought into a relationship with God (cf. 1 Peter 1:3).

The restoration of Hosea's marriage (Chapter 3)

As Hosea's experience with his unfaithful wife portrayed Israel's rejection of the Lord, so the recovery of his wayward wife pictured the Lord's love for and restoration of Israel.

(3:1) The LORD told Hosea to demonstrate his love to his adulterous wife once more. This gracious act would serve as an object lesson of God's great love ('ahābāh) for Israel despite her gross unfaithfulness. Rather than responding favorably to the Lord, she was turning to other gods and loving ('āhab) instead the sacred raisin cakes (flagons of wine), delicacies apparently employed in feasts associated with Baal worship. Perhaps they were similar to the cakes offered to the goddess Astarte "the queen of heaven" (cf. Jer. 7:18; 44:19).

(3:2) Hosea responded obediently to the Lord's command (cf. 1:3). He bought his wife back for a substantial price. A homer and a half-homer (*letheke*) of barley were probably valued together at 15 shekels. So the payment with the 15 shekels of silver and the barley was equivalent to **30 shekels, the price of a slave (cf. Ex. 21:32; Matt. 27:3).** The circumstances surrounding this purchase are uncertain. Whether Hosea had legally divorced Gomer is unknown. She may have become a temple prostitute or was perhaps the legal property of someone who employed her as a concubine or hired her out as a prostitute. The phrase "beloved of her friend" (Hosea 3:1) seems to suggest she was owned by another.

(3:3) After acquiring legal possession of Gomer, Hosea informed her that her adulterous lifestyle was over. She would remain at home *with* him, isolated from all potential lovers. The final clause in verse 3 has the meaning, "*and also I toward you.*" Some scholars understand the expression to be analogous to the preceding you are to live with me, meaning that **both parties** would devote themselves entirely to each other. {**Note:** *Hosea now has two legal claims upon Gomer- the first is that they were joined in **marriage** thus joining them in the sight of God. However, Hosea also "buys back" Gomer from the slave market which pictures her **redemption**. Just as Hosea 'twice-owned' Gomer, so our God has a double claim on those who are His children; He is both **CREATOR** and **REDEEMER** and thereby has absolute rights to us and our lives.* }

The illustration explained (3:4-5)

(3:4) Gomer's lengthy period of isolation was designed to portray Israel's exile, when the nation would be separated from its illicit institutions and practices (cf. 2:6-7). ***The absence of king and prince implied loss of national sovereignty.*** The elimination of sacrifice and sacred stones meant the cessation of formal religious activity. Sacrifices, having been commanded by the Lord, were a legitimate aspect of worship when offered with an attitude of total devotion to God. However, in Israel sacrifices had become contaminated by their association with Baal worship (cf. 4:19) and by the people's failure to obey "the weightier matters of the Law" (Matt. 23:23; cf. Hosea 6:6; 8:11-13). "Sacred stones" (*maṣṣēbâh*) had been a legitimate part of patriarchal worship (cf. Gen. 28:18, 22; 31:13). However, because of those stones' association with pagan religion, Israel was forbidden to use them after entering Canaan (Lev. 26:1; Deut. 16:22). In direct violation of this covenant stipulation Israel had erected such stones as part of its Baal worship (2 Kings 3:2; 10:26-27; 17:10; Hosea 10:1; Micah 5:13).

Ephod and idol refer to methods of divination. In this context the ephod was not the garment worn by a priest, but a **cultic object** (cf. Jud. 8:27). Idols or 'teraphim' (*terāpîm*), sometimes found in homes (Gen. 31:19; 1 Sam. 19:13, 16) or in a king's collection of **divination devices** (Ezek. 21:21), were despised by the Lord (1 Sam. 15:23; 2 Kings 23:24). These two items (ephod and teraphim) are also mentioned together in Judges (17:5; 18:14, 17-18, 20) as part of the belongings of an Ephraimite's personal priest. These instruments of divination were confiscated by the Danites and used in their unauthorized worship system (Jud. 18:27-31).

(3:5) After Israel's period of isolation she will repent and seek the LORD, rather than false gods (2:7; 5:15; cf. Deut. 4:29). Israel will also recognize the authority of the Davidic monarchy, which it rejected at the time of Jeroboam I (cf. 1 Kings 12). The nation will approach the Lord with a healthy sense of fear (*trembling*), **even in the context of blessing**. In the past the nation had taken the Lord's gifts for granted and proudly turned away from His commandments (cf. Hosea 13:6; Deut. 8:10-18). The blessings (lit., "goodness") in view here are wealth and agricultural bounty (cf. Deut. 6:11; Isa. 1:19; Jer. 2:7; 31:12, 14 where the same word, *tûb*, is employed). The concluding phrase, in the last days, was used by the eighth-century prophets as a technical expression for the time of Israel's restoration predicted by Moses (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1; cf. Deut. 4:30, "in latter days").

****Christian Life Application****

Just as Israel was to fear the Lord **in times of blessing** after their relationship had been repaired, even so we, **even in our justified standing before God**, must never lose our fear of Him. This type of fear towards God is not a fear that He will destroy us but it is one of '**reverential awe.**' Biblical fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 3:7). Before any society comes to destruction it loses its fear of God-this truth is evidenced in the eventual collapse of every major civilization this world has known (*Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, German, etc.*) (Rom. 3:18).

Hosea's Message: God's Judgment and Restoration of Israel (chaps. 4-14)

The remainder of Hosea's prophecy expands the message of the first three chapters. Though emphasis is placed on Israel's guilt and impending doom, each of the three major sections (4:1-6:3; 6:4-11:11; 11:12-14:9) concludes on a positive note by referring to Israel's restoration.

The Lord's case against Israel (4:1-6:3)

This first judgment-salvation cycle is comprised of three parts. Chapter 4 focuses on the sins of the Northern Kingdom, while 5:1-15a establishes the guilt of the entire nation (Judah included) and announces judgment. In 5:15b-6:3 Israel's repentance is envisioned.

ISRAEL'S GUILT EXPOSED (CHAP. 4)

The guilt of the Northern Kingdom is the main theme of this opening judgment speech. The people and their leaders (prophets, rulers, and esp. priests) were the objects of God's displeasure. While most of the verses are accusatory in tone, announcements of forthcoming judgment are also scattered throughout (cf. vv. 6-10).

Breach of covenant

(4:1-2) Hosea began this section with an indictment (charge, *rîb*; cf. "charge" in 12:2 and the verb *rîb*, "rebuke," in 2:2) of the nation for breach of covenant. The people were devoid of the qualities that were to characterize life within God's covenant. They failed to exhibit faithfulness and love (*hesed*; cf. 2:19) and did not acknowledge God as their covenant Lord. (Acknowledgment translates *dā'at*, related to *yāda'*, "to know"; cf. comments on 2:20.) Instead they blatantly disobeyed the Decalogue, which epitomized God's ideal for Israelite society. Violations of five of the Ten Commandments are specifically mentioned: cursing, lying (cf. 7:1; 12:1), murder, stealing, and adultery (commandments 3, 9, 6, 8, and 7, in that order). "Cursing" does not refer to improper speech as such, but to calling down a curse on another (cf. Job 31:30). Because such imprecations (for Israelites) entailed invoking God's name, they would be violating the third commandment when such an imprecation was unjustified (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; for an example of a justifiable curse invoking the Lord's name, see Num. 5:19-23).

(4:3) Because of Israel's sin, severe drought would sweep over the land and people would die (waste away). Drought was one of the curses threatened by the Law for breaking the covenant (cf. Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23-24).

The priests' guilt (4:4-11a)

The priests addressed in these verses shared the guilt of the people and therefore would not be exempt from punishment.

(4:4) The guilt of the population as a whole is further established. The first two lines in this verse prohibit either lawsuits among the people or formal opposition to God's charges. In either case the reason for God's prohibition was that all the people were guilty of rebellion. They were like those who brazenly defy God's established human legal authorities (cf. Deut. 17:12).

(4:5a-b) Here the accusation (v. 4) is extended to the religious leaders. Stumble refers to their moral shortcomings (cf. 14:1; Isa. 3:8; Jer. 18:15; Mal. 2:8) or their coming downfall (cf. Hosea 5:5; Isa. 8:15; 28:13; 31:3; Jer. 6:21; 8:12; 20:11). These priests and prophets were attached to the official sanctuaries and royal court. Their allegiance was to their human king, not God (cf. 1 Kings 22:6-8; Amos 7:10-17), and they were characterized by self-gratification (cf. Isa. 28:7; Jer. 23:11) and greed (Jer. 6:13; Micah 3:11).

(4:5c-6) The Lord held these leaders responsible for the people's lack of knowledge (cf. v. 1). The priests in particular had ignored their duty to communicate the Law of ... God to the nation

(cf. Deut. 31:9-13; 33:8-10; Mal. 2:7). So they would be severely but justly punished. Because of their part in the people's moral ruin mothers would be destroyed. This judgment, though unusual, appears elsewhere (cf. Jer. 22:26). In this way the source of the priestly line would be eliminated. As punishment for their rejection of knowledge, the priests themselves would be removed from their office by the Lord. Also because the priests ignored the Law, the Lord said He would ignore their children, apparently meaning they would not inherit their fathers' office (cf. 1 Sam. 2:27-35). In this way the future of the priestly line would be cut off.

The repetition of the verb in each cycle of the announcement of judgment (**destroy ... destroyed... rejected ... reject ... forgotten ... forget**) emphasizes that each punishment fits each crime perfectly.

(4:7) One would expect that an increase in the number of priests would have positive effects on the nation's moral climate. However, in Israel it only brought greater sin.

(4:8) In their greed the priests fed on the sins of the people by encouraging them to multiply the hypocritical sacrifices which the Lord hated (cf. 6:6; 8:11-13). The priests' underlying motive in doing this was greed, since they received portions of the offerings which were presented (cf. Lev. 7:7-10, 28-34; Num. 18:8-19; Deut. 18:1-5).

(4:9-10a) Because the priests were no different from the other people, they also would experience the effects of the covenant curses. Despite their greedy schemes to accumulate food, their appetites would not be satisfied for drought would make food scarce (cf. 4:3; Lev. 26:26; Micah 6:14). Their efforts to promote fertility through cult prostitution would not succeed (cf. Hosea 2:13b; Deut. 28:18a).

(4:10b-11a) The priests' sin is summarized here. They had deserted the LORD by breaking His covenant (cf. Deut. 28:20; 29:25; 31:16). In this case prostitution was a sarcastic substitution for the Lord's commandments, which frequently appear as the object of the verb "to keep" (*šāmar*) in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 4:2; 5:10, 29; 6:2; etc.). The Hebrew, "for the Lord they have forsaken to obey". In this case the clause must be understood as highly elliptical, the sense being, "they have forsaken the Lord, refusing to observe His commandments."

The people's guilt (4:11b-19)

(4:11b-14) The scope of the accusation widened to include the people in general. Sensual pleasures had robbed them of their senses, leaving them without understanding. They engaged in pagan worship practices, including divination (seeking answers by a stick of wood), sacrificed to false gods, and engaged in cult prostitution (cf. 5:4). The Canaanite shrines, which Moses had commanded Israel to destroy (cf. Deut. 12:2-3), were located on hills and/or under shady trees (oak, poplar, and terebinth) throughout the Northern Kingdom (cf. 2 Kings 17:10-11). Here many young women (daughters) of Israel took part in sexual rites with male cult prostitutes (cf. Deut. 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24). The intent of such acts was to ensure human and agricultural fecundity by making the fertility deities Baal and Asherah favorably inclined to their offerings and prayers. However, these women would not be singled out for divine punishment because the men frequented the shrines as well (Hosea 4:14). In response to such an obvious failure to grasp and apply the most basic principles of covenant life, the Lord cried out, A people without understanding (cf. v. 11) will come to ruin!

(4:15) Judah was now warned to avoid the sins of her sister Israel. This need not mean that the people of Judah were in the habit of visiting northern cultic sites, such as Gilgal (cf. 9:15) and Beth Aven. The threefold warning (*Do not go ... do not go ... do not swear*) is a rhetorical device designed to accentuate Israel's guilt.

To associate oneself with Israel's false, hypocritical worship would be contaminating. Even **Bethel** (lit., "house of God"), the site of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:10-19), had become "**Beth Aven**" (lit., "house of wickedness"; cf. Hosea 10:5; Amos 5:5) because of the religious practices conducted there (1 Kings 12:28-30; 2 Kings 10:29; 23:15; Amos 4:4). In the midst of this idolatrous, immoral worship the Israelites even had the audacity to employ the Lord's name in oaths. The Law commanded Israel to swear by the Lord's name (Deut. 6:13; 10:20). However, to make a semblance of devotion to the LORD while serving other gods was the grossest hypocrisy.

(4:16) Through her refusal to repent Israel had separated herself from the Lord's protective guidance. As long as the nation responded like a young cow, stubbornly resisting His leading, God would treat her appropriately (cf. Jer. 31:18), not like a lamb which is allowed to graze leisurely in broad pastures. Stubborn refers to a rebellious attitude which the LORD finds deplorable (cf. Deut. 21:18-21).

(4:17) Because of her strong attachment to idolatry (joined to idols) Israel was to be left to herself and allowed to go to her doom. Ephraim, a prominent tribe in the Northern Kingdom, mentioned 36 times in the Book of Hosea, stands for Israel as a whole (cf. the parallelism in 5:3, 5; also cf. Isa. 7:2, 5, 8-9, 17).

(4:18) The accusation concludes as it began by referring to the carousing and immorality which characterized the people and their rulers (cf. v. 11). Rulers "shields," a term which suggests the positive, protective role which a nation's leaders should play (cf. Ps. 84:9, 11; 89:18). Israel's rulers failed miserably in this regard, loving only shameful deeds.

(4:19) The result of Israel's sin would be judgment. The first line has the idea that "the wind has enveloped her with its wings," suggesting that she soon would be swept away. At that time the idolatrous sacrifices would prove to be only a source of disappointment and shame (cf. 10:5-6).

Israel's Judgment Announced (5:1-15)

The Northern Kingdom remains the primary target group in this section. However, Judah, which had been warned to avoid Israel's example (4:15), was now brought within the scope of God's judgment (cf. 5:5, 8, 10, 13-14). The chapter begins with an accusation of guilt (vv. 1-5) which merges into an announcement of judgment (vv. 6-15a).

(5:1-2) Though the accusation encompassed the entire nation (you Israelites), the priesthood (priests) and monarchy (royal house) were singled out for special consideration (cf. 4:4-10, 18). The leaders had encouraged the people to engage in false worship at cult sites such as Mizpah and Tabor. In so doing they were like a snare or net used to trap a bird (cf. 7:12; Amos 3:5). Mount Tabor was in northern Israel, about 12 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Mizpah in this context refers to a site either in Gilead or in Benjamite territory. If the former, then the places mentioned represent areas of the Northern Kingdom west and east of the Jordan River. If the reference is to Mizpah of Benjamin, the idea is that all cult sites from south to north were involved. In either case the selection of place names was designed to emphasize how the false worship led by the priests had permeated the land.

The rebellious priesthood (rebels) had gone to great depths (are deep) as it were, to slaughter their prey (continuing the hunting imagery of Hosea 5:1b), the people of Israel.

The "discipline" in v.2b (*mûsār*) refers here to severe punishment designed to restore one to proper behavior. As such, it is an expression of love that arises out of a close relationship (cf. Prov. 3:11; 13:24; 15:5). The **positive** goal of the Lord's judgment is evident (cf. Hosea 2:6-7; 5:15b).

(5:3-5) The guilt of the nation as a whole is declared. Israel could not hide its sin from the omniscient God. The nation had become corrupt (*tāmā'*, “to be unclean or defiled”) through its spiritual adultery (cf. 6:10). This wording is probably drawn from Numbers 5:20, 27-28 where the same verb (*tāmā'*) describes the effects of adultery on the unfaithful party (cf. Lev. 18:20, 24). Sinful Israel had become so overpowered by a spirit of prostitution (Hosea 5:4; cf. 4:12) that any possibility of repentance and recognition of the Lord’s authority was precluded for the time being. The nation’s own arrogance served as a legal witness (testifies; cf. the same expression in 1 Sam. 12:3; 2 Sam. 1:16) to its guilt and, in accordance with the famous proverb (Prov. 16:18), had led to its fall (cf. stumble in Hosea 4:5). Judah had followed Israel’s example and had come to mortal ruin as well.

(5:6) The Lord’s punishment of His people would be expressed in two ways: **withdrawal of aid and blessing** (vv. 6-7, 15a), and **active warfare** (vv. 8-14). In the days ahead Israel in desperation would seek the LORD through sacrifices of flocks and herds. However, this hypocritical ritualism, devoid of genuine covenant loyalty, would be ineffective (cf. 6:6; 8:11-13; Isa. 1:10-17).

(5:7) God’s people had been unfaithful. The Hebrew verb (*bāḡaḏ*) often refers to a failure to carry out the responsibilities of a natural (cf. Jer. 12:6) or contractual (cf. Jud. 9:6, 23; Mal. 2:14-16) relationship. Here marital infidelity provides the background (cf. Jer. 3:20). As in the preceding chapters, Hosea pictured Israel as the Lord’s adulterous wife. Carrying on the figure, she had even given birth to illegitimate children, an inevitable result of her promiscuous activities. The reality behind the figure was perhaps those Israelite children whose birth was attributed to cultic sexual acts (cf. Hosea 4:13-15).

Such rituals only heightened the people’s guilt. Participation in religious festivals (here represented by the New Moon celebrations; cf. 2:11) would actually hasten their destruction, not avert it. Rather than experiencing population growth, the people would ultimately be devoured by their own sins (cf. Lev. 26:21-22; Deut. 28:62-63). The fields, for which they sought fertility through Baal worship, would be destroyed by drought, blight, and insects, and would be overrun by invading armies (cf. Lev. 26:16, 19-20; Deut. 28:17, 22-24, 33, 38-42, 51).

(5:8-9) The sound of battle trumpets was about to be heard in Israel. An invading force would sweep to the borders of the Southern Kingdom. Gibeah and Ramah were located a few miles north of Jerusalem in Benjamite territory in the Southern Kingdom (cf. Josh. 18:25, 28). Beth Aven (probably Bethel; cf. Hosea 4:15), though originally a Benjamite town (Josh. 18:22), was then just inside Israel’s southern border.

The desolation of Ephraim was certain to take place because it had been announced by the Lord, whose word is inviolable (“made known that which shall surely be”). This coming judgment would fulfill the covenant curse in Leviticus 26:32-35.

(5:10) Even Judah would not be spared ultimately (cf., however, 1:7). Its leaders were also guilty of breach of covenant. They were like those who move boundary stones for they showed no respect for God’s commands. Moving boundary stones was clearly forbidden in the Law (Deut. 19:14) and carried a curse (Deut. 27:17). The act was tantamount to theft as it obscured the legal boundary between properties and was a way of taking some land that belonged to another. Perhaps this particular crime was cited in order to allude to the acts of social injustice being carried out by the Judean upper class (cf. Isa. 5:8; Micah 2:1-2). On Judah’s sinful leaders the Lord would pour out His anger like a flood of water (lit., “like water”), possibly meaning like rainwater (cf. Amos 5:8; 9:6).

(5:11) According to verses 11-14, judgment had already begun. Ephraim was oppressed and trampled. Again Hosea alluded to a covenant curse (cf. Deut. 28:33). This judgment may refer to the Assyrian invasion of 733 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 15:29). However, Israel’s troubles were ultimately attributable to her own sin, not to Assyrian imperialism.

(5:12) The Lord Himself was silently but effectively leading His people toward destruction. To Ephraim He was like a moth, which destroys clothing (cf. Job 13:28; Isa. 50:9; 51:8). To Judah He was like rot, which progressively causes bones to decay (cf. Prov. 12:4; 14:30; Hab. 3:16). This unusual figurative language means that God was sovereignly in control of the international scene, which He was already manipulating to bring about Israel's demise.

(5:13) The nation's response to its deteriorating condition (like a sickness with sores) was entirely misdirected. Following the path of political expediency, the Northern Kingdom turned to the invader himself, Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria, in an effort to restore national stability. This probably refers to Hoshea's alliance with Assyria (2 Kings 17:3) at the time he usurped the throne of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 15:30). Judah had formed a similar alliance when threatened by Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16). Though Hosea 5:13b does not specifically mention Judah, the contextual references to her (vv. 13a, 14a) suggest that she was in Hosea's mind as well. These efforts to heal the nation's wounds would be futile. Assyria was a greedy overseer, not a physician. As soon as Hoshea withheld tribute, the Assyrians again invaded the land (2 Kings 17:3-6).

(5:14) The moth (v. 12) is transformed into a raging lion which violently kills its prey. The use of six first-person forms (I) in the Hebrew emphasizes God's role in this judgment. In the final analysis the Lord Himself would be the attacker and destroyer, even though He would use foreign armies as His instruments.

For Ephraim this prophecy was fulfilled a few years later when Assyria conquered Samaria and carried the people into exile (2 Kings 17). Judah was overrun by the Assyrians in 701 B.C., but she experienced a miraculous deliverance after being severely ravaged (cf. 1:7). The prophecy about Judah's fall and exile (5:14) was eventually fulfilled through Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25).

(5:15) The ultimate purpose of the Lord's judgment on His people was to restore them (cf. 2:5-7). Having received the just punishment for their sins, God's people would turn to Him in repentance. God would not hear their prayers. He would go back to His place like a lion returning to its lair (cf. 5:14) till the nation underwent its punishment. In contrast with their earlier hypocritical quest for the Lord through sacrificial ritual (cf. v. 6), the people will genuinely and earnestly seek Him.

Dialogue between Jehovah and His Wife (6:1-11)

(6:1-3) These verses record the words the penitent generation of the future will declare as they seek the LORD. The message is constructed in two cycles, each containing an exhortation (vv. 1a, 3a) and a motivating promise (vv. 1b-2, 3b).

In contrast with her past folly (cf. 5:13), Israel will turn to the LORD as her source of healing and life (cf. Deut. 32:39). Assyria was not able to cure Israel (Hosea 5:13), but the Lord is able, even though like a lion (5:14) He had torn them to pieces. **The people will confidently anticipate His forthcoming restoration of their national vitality. The equivalent expressions, after two days and on the third day, refer to a short period of time, indicating they expected the revival to occur soon.** Israel will also resolve to acknowledge the Lord's authority (contrast 4:1, 6; 5:4). Press on is literally, "pursue or chase," which suggests the intensity of Israel's newfound devotion.

The Lord will surely respond favorably to such loyalty. His emergence from His hiding place (cf. 5:6, 15) will be as certain as the sunrise. He will pour out His blessings on His people, as the winter and spring rains ... water the earth and assure agricultural prosperity. The latter comparison was especially well chosen since **the regularity of these rains was a sign of the Lord's favor** (cf. Deut. 11:13-15).

(6:4) The Lord's argument here begins with a rhetorical question addressed both to Ephraim and Judah. The mood is one of despair and frustration. God's people had rejected all His attempts to bring them to their senses. Their love (*hesed*; cf. 2:19; 4:1) for the Lord was at **best transitory** (6:4b). Like the early morning fog or dew, any expression of loyalty quickly evaporated.

(6:5) God's measures to bring His disloyal people to repentance had been extreme (cf. Amos 4:6-11). His words of judgment, spoken through the prophets, had brought sudden death and destruction on many people (cf. Jer. 1:10; 5:14).

(6:6) The reason for such severe discipline is reiterated: God's people had failed to understand His true desire. He longed for devotion (*hesed*, mercy) and loyalty (acknowledgment of God; cf. 2:20; 4:1, 6) expressed through allegiance to the covenant demands. Unless offered in the context of obedience, sacrifices were meaningless and even offensive (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-20; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8).

(6:7) Rather than pleasing God, the people had broken the covenant and been unfaithful (*bāḡad*; cf. comments on 5:7) to God. **"Like men"** takes the Hebrew *'ādām* in its widely attested generic sense, rather than as a proper name. In this case a comparison is made with fallen mankind, whose propensity to be unfaithful is well established (cf. Isa. 40:6-8, man's *hesed* ["glory," Isa. 40:6] is as transitory as grass and flowers that wither in the sun).

(6:8) Widespread physical violence was just one example of the people's unfaithfulness (vv. 8-9; cf. Ex. 20:13). Since Gilead was a district, not a city, the reference in Hosea 6:8a is probably to the city Ramoth Gilead, east of the Jordan. The town had become a center for wicked men (lit., "workers of iniquity"). It refers to the worst sort of men, who actively oppose righteousness and are the objects of God's hatred. In this case they were guilty of murder (Hosea 6:8b). The city streets are pictured as being tracked with blood from the murderers' sandals (cf. 1 Kings 2:5). The figurative language emphasizes both the extent and certainty of their guilt. Unfortunately the precise historical background for the crime cannot be determined. Perhaps oppression of the poor is in view. Elsewhere "workers of iniquity" are said to be guilty of oppressing the poor which is only occasionally associated with murder (cf. Ps. 94:4-6; Isa. 1:21-23).

(6:9) The background of this verse is equally obscure. Perhaps groups of priests were actually murdering travelers to Shechem. A more likely explanation is that the language is hyperbolic, perhaps pointing to the priests' false teaching and involvement in social exploitation. The references to **(Ramoth) Gilead and Shechem are well chosen. Joshua had designated that both of these towns be cities of refuge, where manslayers could find asylum** (Josh. 20:1-2, 7-8) In this way the land would be spared outbreaks of bloodshed, and justice would be promoted. Ironically in Hosea's day these cities had become associated with bloodshed and injustice.

The priests' crimes were shameful. Elsewhere this word (*zimmâh*) is used of the vilest sexual sins, including incest (Lev. 18:17), cult prostitution (Lev. 19:29), rape (Jud. 20:5-6), and adultery (Job 31:9-11). This sexual connotation is probably applicable here because the priests' breach of covenant (Hosea 6:6-7) is likened to prostitution (v. 10).

(6:10-11) The nation's sin is described in powerful figurative language. The widespread breach of covenant (vv. 6-7) was a horrible thing. Jeremiah used a related term to describe rotten figs that are inedible (Jer. 29:17). Israel had become defiled by her prostitution, that is, her unfaithfulness to the Lord (cf. Hosea 5:3). The comparison of judgment to a harvest (cf. Jer. 51:33; Joel 3:13) emphasizes its certainty (appointed) and its thoroughness.

(7:1) The reference to the Lord's desire to heal (cf. 6:1) His people comes near the beginning of this subunit. God longed to restore Israel to a place of blessing, but His efforts were met with new outbreaks of sin and crimes. The people's widespread deceit and robbery epitomized their lack of regard for the covenant (cf. Ex. 20:15).

(7:2) To make matters worse, they disregarded God's moral character by failing to realize that He was taking careful notice of their sin (cf. Ps. 50:16-21). Therefore like a wall their sins had completely surrounded (did engulf) them, making repentance improbable.

(7:3) The rulers were no different from their subjects. A godly ruler was to oppose all forms of wickedness within his kingdom (cf. Ps. 101), but these leaders delighted in it.

(7:4) Israel was a nation of adulterers. It is not clear whether general breach of covenant (cf. 6:10) or literal adultery (cf. 4:2, 13-14) is described here. In either case Israel's passion for disobedience was like a fire burning low in an oven while the baker kneads the dough and waits for the leavening process to be completed. Like an oven fire, Israel's passion might subside for a short time, but it was ever present, ready to blaze forth when kindled (cf. 7:6).

(7:5-6) Between 752 and 732 B.C. four of Israel's rulers were assassinated (cf. 2 Kings 15). This political intrigue provides the background for Hosea 7:5-7. Here a description is given of how the conspirators characteristically carried out their plots.

The day of the festival of our king probably refers to a special celebration in which the ruler was the center of attention. The king caroused with his princes, who are called mockers probably because they were completely under the influence of wine (cf. Prov. 20:1). While they partied with the naive king, they plotted his overthrow.

One might paraphrase verse 6: *"When they approach the king their hearts, like an oven, contain a fire. Just as the fire burns lowly while the baker is inactive, so their scheme remains a secret. But when their time for action comes, the destructive plot is realized, just as a fire in an oven blazes forth when the time for baking arrives."*

(7:7) Because the royal court of Israel was filled with such murderers, the kingship frequently changed hands. Throughout this period of palace revolt and regicide no one bothered to look to the Lord, the true King of Israel and her only Source of national stability.

(7:8) Instead Ephraim launched a futile foreign policy (vv. 8-12). The baking metaphor continues in verse 8 (cf. vv. 4, 6-7). Israel had formed alliances with foreign nations (cf. v. 11; 8:9). This is compared to the mixing of flour with oil to form cakes (*bālal*, mixes, is frequently used in this sense). This policy had proven self-destructive. **Israel had become like an unturned cake on hot stones—burned and soon to be discarded.**

(7:9) The negative effects of Israel's foreign policy are described further in this verse. The nation is compared to an elderly man who has failed to notice the gradual effects of the aging process (loss of physical strength, graying hair). **Death is much closer than he expects.** The point was probably that Israel was experiencing loss of political autonomy. This loss was epitomized by the tribute payments that were an excessive drain on its wealth and economy (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-20; 17:3).

(7:10) Despite her weakened condition, Israel did not repent. The nation's refusal (arrogance) to acknowledge the covenant God was self-incriminating (cf. testifieth to his face; also see comments on 5:5).

(7:11) In her efforts to arrange foreign alliances, Israel could be compared to a dove, which exhibits little sense. Under Menahem (ca. 743 or 738 B.C.) Israel submitted to Assyrian demands (2 Kings 15:19-20). Pekah (ca. 734 B.C.) joined a coalition against Assyria, which Tiglath-Pileser III violently crushed (2 Kings 15:29). Hoshea (ca. 732-722 B.C.), after acknowledging Assyrian rulership for a time, stopped tribute payments and sought an alliance with Egypt (2 Kings 17:3-4a). This act of rebellion led to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17:4b-6), the inevitable result of a foreign policy which for 20 years had been characterized by **vacillating** and **expedient measures**.

(7:12) Worst of all, Israel's policy had no place for the Lord (cf. vv. 7, 10). Consequently He Himself would intervene in judgment. While Israel sought out alliances with all the *naiveté* of a dove (v. 11), the Lord would come **like a wise and well-equipped fowler** and trap them.

(7:13) This brief unit begins on an ominous note. Woe (*'ôy*) suggests impending doom (cf. Num. 21:29; Jer. 4:13, 31; 48:46), as the next sentence (cf. Destruction to them) clearly shows. The basis for judgment was Israel's rebellion (cf. Hosea 8:1; 13:16) against the Lord (because they have strayed from Me and because they have rebelled against Me). Despite His desire to save them (God said, I long to redeem them), they had spoken lies against Him. The word for "redeem" (*pādāh*) is used frequently to describe the deliverance from Egypt (cf. Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 2 Sam. 7:23; Ps. 78:42; Micah 6:4). **The God of the Exodus is unchanged in His will, but because of Israel's lies there will be no 'exodus' from the Assyrian danger.** In this context "lies" probably refers to Israel's practical denial of God's redemptive ability, expressed through her attempts to find security through other nations.

(7:14) Israel's rejection of the Lord is illustrated here. The nation desired a plentiful crop (grain and new wine) but refused to exhibit the wholehearted devotion to God without which agricultural prosperity was impossible. They wailed (*yālāl*; lit., "howled"; cf. Joel 1:11) as they mourned over the crop failure. The prophets of Baal wailed and cried in an effort to arouse Baal, the storm god, to action (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).

(7:15) Israel's rebellion also revealed her ingratitude. The Lord had trained ... and strengthened them. Elsewhere the expression "strengthened their arms" can refer to divine bestowal of military might (Ezek. 30:24-25). Perhaps Israel's past military successes (including those of Jeroboam II; cf. 2 Kings 14:25-28) are in view. Despite experiencing divine aid in battle, Israel treated God like an enemy. The phrase, **"imagine mischief against Me"** suggests intense hostility and ill will. Similar language is used to describe Joseph's brothers' schemes to destroy him (Gen. 50:20).

(7:16) Israel's hostility toward the Lord was an expression of her unfaithfulness. Israel was like a faulty bow. *Such a weapon is unreliable because it fails to respond properly to the archer.* In the same way Israel's hostile response to God's grace demonstrated her unreliable, disloyal character (cf. Ps. 78:57). The nation's leaders, who had rejected their true source of strength (cf. Hosea 7:15), would be destroyed in battle because of their pride. **"The rage of their tongue"** refers to a formal denunciation or curse. Israel's rejection of divine aid (cf. v. 13) in favor of foreign alliances is compared to a verbal reproach against God. Ironically Israel would become an object of derision among the Egyptians, whose aid they had foolishly sought (cf. v. 11).

Israel's rebellion punished (Ch. 8)

This section includes several specific illustrations of the nation's rebellious attitude and announces God's coming judgment.

(8:1) The chapter begins with a note of alarm. A trumpet must be blown to signal an impending battle (cf. 5:8). An enemy (the Assyrians) was ready to swoop down on Israel like a powerful eagle. The announcement of judgment recalls the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:49. The house of the LORD refers here to the land of Israel. Again Israel was said to be rebellious (cf. 7:13).

(8:2-3) Israel made a pretense of devotion to the Lord, addressing Him as her own God and claiming to acknowledge His authority over her. This profession, however, was mere lip service (cf. 4:1, 6; 5:4). **Her sinful actions spoke louder than her words.** In reality she had rejected what was good (the Lord's moral and ethical requirements; cf. Amos 5:14-15; Micah 6:8). Consequently an enemy would soon pursue her. The swift retreat pictured here fulfills another covenant curse (cf. Deut. 28:45).

(8:4) Two examples of Israel's sin are given in verses 4-6. She had appointed kings and other leaders without consulting the Lord. This alludes to the series of palace revolts that plagued the Northern Kingdom after Jeroboam II's reign (cf. 7:5-7). Israel had also made idols for themselves in direct violation of the second commandment (cf. Ex. 20:4).

(8:5) The **calf-idol** of Samaria (cf. v. 6) was singled out because it epitomized Israel's idolatrous ways. Since there is no record of such an idol being erected in Samaria, the city may stand here for the Northern Kingdom as a whole (cf. 7:1; 10:7). If so, the calf-idol was probably the image set up by Jeroboam I at Bethel (cf. 1 Kings 12:28-30; Hosea 10:5). By setting up golden calves (one in Dan and one in Bethel), **Jeroboam repeated the sins of an earlier generation (cf. Ex. 32:1-4)**. Probably the people associated these calves with the storm and fertility god Baal (cf. Hosea 13:1-2).

Israel had rejected (*zānah*) what is good and turned to idols. The Lord responded appropriately by rejecting (*zānah*) Israel's idols. As Moses and Joshua had warned (Deut. 11:17; Josh. 23:16), the Lord's anger burned against the idolaters. In despair the Lord asked, *How long will they be incapable of purity?*

(8:6) The calf-idol (v. 5) was a *product of a human craftsman's skill; how, then, could it be considered a god?* (Cf. Isa. 40:18-20; 44:9-20.) The words, it is not God, were probably meant to refute Jeroboam, who said of the calves, "Behold thy gods, O Israel" (1 Kings 12:28; cf. Ex. 32:4). The destruction of this image would demonstrate the **futility** of idolatry.

(8:7) The phrase they sow the wind is transitional. It alludes to the futility of both **her idolatrous worship** (vv. 4-6) and her **foreign policy** (vv. 8-10). "Wind" here represents that which lacks substance and is therefore worthless and of no assistance (cf. Prov. 11:29). **Israel would reap in extra measure what she had sown.** The futility (wind) which she had planted like seed would yield a crop of destruction (represented by the whirlwind). *All her efforts directed toward self-preservation would be self-destructive.*

The agricultural metaphor continues. Israel's crop would be worthless, containing only stalks without grain. Even if she would produce grain, foreigners would take it away and the nation would not benefit from her labor.

(8:8) Already Israel had been swallowed up by her foreign policy (cf. 7:8-12). Her involvement with foreigners was swiftly robbing the nation of its strength and identity as the Lord's people. Israel had become as worthless as a broken pot (cf. Jer. 22:28; 48:38). The words, in essence, mean **"a vessel in which no one delights."**

(8:9) Israel's attempt to ally with Assyria could be compared to the wandering of a **wild donkey, an animal well known for its desire to be independent of all restrictions** (cf. Job 39:5-8). Israel's alliances were also compared to prostitution; like a harlot she had sold herself to lovers (i.e., foreign powers).

(8:10) Despite Israel's desperate attempts to preserve herself, God's judgment were certain. The Lord is pictured as bringing her back from her wanderings to Assyria and Egypt so that He might oppress her (cf. 7:13). The instrument of judgment would be the mighty King (**i.e., of Assyria; cf. 10:6**) from whom, ironically, they had sought aid.

(8:11-13) Another of Israel's sins was its hypocritical ritualism. The people had built many altars for sin offerings. But these altars had become altars for sinning, as the religious acts conducted there were hypocritical. Sacrifices are an offense to God when not combined with a wholehearted devotion to His commandments (cf. 6:6; Isa. 1:11). Israel had built many altars, but at the same time had treated the many things of God's Law (His covenant demands; cf. Hosea 8:1) as something alien. So the Lord would not accept the sacrifices she offered Him. Instead He would punish her for her sins by sending her into exile. Egypt stands here as a symbol for exile and bondage (cf. 9:3; 11:5; Deut. 28:68). **This highlights the appropriateness of God's judgment. In the deliverance from Egyptian bondage Israel had experienced God's grace. Having spurned that grace, she would return to slavery.**

(8:14) A final illustration of the nation's unfaithfulness was her **self-sufficiency**. Judah is specifically included in the indictment at this point. Having forgotten (cf. 2:13) that her very existence depended on the Lord alone (cf. his Maker), God's people proudly sought *prominence* (temples) and *security* (fenced cities) through her own efforts (**cf. Gen. 15:1- God had Himself promised to be those things to Israel – 'great reward' (prominence) and 'shield' (security)**). But the Lord was about to destroy (by fire) these sources of false security, fulfilling a covenant curse (cf. Deut. 28:52). God's judgment came through the Assyrians. **Sennacherib would indeed "come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and {take} them"** (2 Kings 18:13).

Israel's hostility punished (Ch.9)

(9:1-2) Israel was not to rejoice in expectation of a plentiful harvest (cf. v. 2) because her unfaithfulness had precluded any further divine blessing (v. 1; cf. 2:8-9). At every threshing floor Israel had erroneously attributed the prosperity of her harvests to Baal (cf. 2:5). She had become an adulteress, offering worship to Baal and receiving from Baal the wages of a prostitute. Those “rewards” were wheat (at the threshing floor), vines and figs (2:12), and food, water, wool, linen, oil, and drink (2:5). **That is, Israel believed that by prostituting herself in worship of Baal that Baal in turn blessed her crops and gave her other necessities of life.**

The plentiful harvests were about to end (9:2; cf. 2:9-12). In fulfillment of several covenant curses (cf. Deut. 28:30, 38-42, 51) the Lord would take away her grain and wine (cf. Hosea 2:9; 7:14). Winepresses (*yeqeb*) were used for both **grapes** and **olives** (*wine and oil*) (cf. Joel 2:24).

(9:3) The judgment pictured in verse 2 would be accomplished ultimately through invasion and exile. The land belonged to the Lord (cf. Ex. 15:17; Lev. 25:23), who was responsible for its fertility (cf. Deut. 11:10-12). When the people attributed the produce of the land to Baal they forfeited the blessing of living on it in peace and prosperity (Deut. 11:8-21). Egypt is again mentioned as a symbol of the place of exile (cf. Hosea 7:16; 8:13; 11:5). Assyria would be the actual location (2 Kings 17:6). There in an unclean land (cf. Amos 7:17) Israel would be forced to eat ceremonially unclean food (cf. Ezek. 4:13), rather than the fruits of God's blessing. **The punishment fit the crime.** Israel had become defiled by her sin (cf. Hosea 5:3; 6:10). How appropriate, then, that she eat defiled food in a defiled land.

(9:4) In exile, opportunity for legitimate worship to the LORD would end. Again the punishment was highly appropriate. Israel's Levitical worship had been corrupted by hypocrisy (cf. 6:6; 8:11-13). A nation that refused to conduct its formal worship in the proper spirit would be denied its privilege of worship. Wine offerings, which accompanied certain types of sacrifices (cf. Num. 15:1-12), would cease. Sacrifices offered in a foreign land would not be acceptable to the Lord. They would have the same effect on a worshiper as bread eaten by mourners, who made everything they touched ceremonially unclean because they had contacted a dead body (cf. Num. 19:14-15, 22). Such bread was not fit for use in worship.

(9:5) The rhetorical question in this verse emphasizes the exiles' plight. Israel would be unable to celebrate the most important festival (feasts and days in Heb. are both sing.) on her religious calendar. Perhaps the **Feast of Tabernacles** is specifically in view (cf. Lev. 23:39).

(9:6) Destruction would sweep over the land (cf. 7:13; 10:14). Those who happened to escape the sword of the invading army would face exile. The reference to Egypt probably has the same meaning as in preceding verses (cf. comments on 8:13; 9:3). **Memphis**, about 20 miles south of modern Cairo, **was famous as a burial place.** Here it symbolizes the ultimate destination of the exiles—a foreign graveyard. Few would ever return to their homeland (cf. Jer. 44:1-14). Meanwhile back in Israel the exiles' possessions (treasures of silver) and homes (tabernacles) would lie in ruins and would be overgrown by **nettles** (briers) and **thorns** (cf. Hosea 10:8; also Cf. **Gen.3:18**).

(9:7) The people's hostility toward the true prophets of God was one of several reasons for judgment (vv. 7-9). 'Madness' refers to one who is insane (cf. 1 Sam. 21:13-15). The term is used elsewhere by godless men who ridiculed true prophets (cf. 2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26-27). 'Hatred' (also used in Hosea 9:8) refers to **intense animosity**, such as Esau felt toward Jacob after Esau had been cheated of the paternal blessing (Gen. 27:41, "*held a grudge*").

(9:8) The irony of the situation is that Israel tried to ensnare the prophets God had placed as watchmen over the nation. A watchman was responsible for warning a city of an approaching enemy (cf. Ezek. 33:6). In the same way God's prophets were to warn the people of coming

judgment on sin (cf. Jer. 6:17; Ezek. 3:17; 33:7-9). The house of his God refers to the land of Israel (cf. Hosea 8:1; 9:15).

(9:9) The depth of the people's sin against God is emphasized by Hosea's reference to the days of **Gibeah** (cf. 10:9). The phrase recalls the events that involved the brutal rape and murder of the Levite's concubine by some bisexual men of Gibeah (Jud. 19). On that occasion it was said, "There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt" (Jud. 19:30). But Hosea said that black mark on Israel's history was now **rivaled** by Israel's blatant sins against the Lord.

(9:10) This section begins with a reference to Israel's origins, when the Lord found extreme delight in the nation (cf. 2:15). Grapes in the desert would be an unexpected source of **surprise and delight**. The delicious early fruit on the fig tree was irresistible (cf. Song 2:13; Isa. 28:4; Jer. 24:2; Micah 7:1).

However, the Lord's attitude toward His people soon changed. When they arrived at Peor they engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite and Midianite women as part of the fertility rites associated with the worship of Baal Peor (cf. Num. 25). This deity, which God called that shameful idol, may have been a local manifestation of the Canaanite fertility god Baal. **This event in Moses' day was mentioned here because it set the pattern for Israel's subsequent history, characterized by unfaithfulness.** In Hosea's day Israel had also defiled herself by making Baal her lover. Like the generation at Peor, they too had engaged in fertility rites (cf. Hosea 4:13-14).

(9:11-14) As punishment for Israel's sin of involvement in the Baal fertility rites (v. 10), the Lord would bring the covenant curses of **infertility** (vv. 11, 14), **death** (vv. 12-13, 16), and **exile** (vv. 15, 17) on the nation. The name Ephraim is used in verses 11, 13, and 16 because it was associated with fertility and fruitfulness (cf. Gen. 41:52).

Ephraim's glory, here associated with numerous offspring, would depart as swiftly as a bird. Appropriately many of those who had tried to secure fertility through Baal worship would become sterile and barren (cf. Hosea 4:10 and, in contrast, Deut. 7:14). Others would miscarry or watch their children die in the forthcoming invasion (Hosea 9:12-13; cf. v. 16b). The women's breasts would be dry for they would have no children to nurse (v. 14).

(9:15) The sinful people were now the object of God's hatred, rather than His love. The Lord had become displeased with His wife, unfaithful Israel. Such displeasure is termed hatred (cf. Deut. 22:13; 24:3, where the same verb, *śānē'*, is used). God was prepared to drive her from the household (drive them out of Mine house), withdrawing His love (His devotion and protective care as her Husband; cf. Hosea 1:6; 2:4-5). The rebellious nation, whose opposition to the Lord's covenant was epitomized by the Gilgal fertility cult (cf. 4:15; 12:11), would be expelled from His "house" (i.e., the land; cf. 8:1; 9:8). "Drive ... out" (*gāraš*) is used frequently of the conquest of Canaan, whereby the Lord gave Israel possession of His land (cf. Ex. 23:28, 31; Deut. 33:27). Now Israel was about to suffer the same fate as the Canaanites, whose practices it had assimilated. **Hosea may also be alluding here to the sinful couple's initial expulsion from God's presence (cf. Gen. 3:24).**

(9:16-17) Ironically, because of widespread sterility and infant mortality (vv. 11-14), Ephraim, once a symbol of fruitfulness, would be compared to a withered plant incapable of bearing fruit. Because of her disobedience Israel would be rejected by God (cf. 4:6). In exile Israel's people would become **wanderers** among the nations. "Wanderers" translates the same Hebrew word (*nāḏaq*) as **"strayed."** Again the punishment fit the crime. Those who willfully strayed from the path of covenant loyalty were condemned to wander aimlessly among those outside the covenant (foreign nations). As in 9:15, the language in verse 17 may also allude to the Genesis account. The same verb (*nāḏaq*) is used with respect to **Cain** (Gen. 4:12).

Israel's "double sin" punished (Ch. 10)

(10:1) As in 9:10 this prophecy employs a botanical metaphor in referring to Israel's earlier history. The Lord planted Israel like a vine in the land of Canaan and blessed her with fruit (i.e., prosperity; cf. Ps. 80:8-11; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10-11). **However, as the nation prospered she erroneously attributed her success to false gods rather than the Lord (cf. Hosea 2:8; Deut. 8:8-20).** At the same time the people attempted to maintain a *semblance* of devotion to the God of Israel. The altars mentioned here probably refer to this hypocritical formalism (cf. Hosea 6:6; 8:11-13), while sacred stones allude to idolatry (cf. 3:4; 10:2).

(10:2) Israel's unfaithfulness established her guilt (cf. 12:14, 13:12, 16) and necessitated her punishment. **The phrase "is divided" (*hālaq*) literally means "is slippery, smooth."** Often the term is used of deceitful, unreliable speech (cf. Ps. 5:9; 12:2; 55:21). With their heart (or mind) as subject *hālaq* refers to the hypocrisy which characterized her approach to the Lord. Appropriately the LORD would destroy the sites of her hypocritical and false worship (cf. sacred stones in 3:4; 10:1).

(10:3) As a result of the approaching invasion, the nation's political structure would be shattered and her king removed (cf. vv. 7, 15). In the aftermath of the calamity the people would recognize their own unfaithfulness (i.e., failure to revere the LORD) as the basis for judgment. The situation would become so hopeless that most would realize that even a king could bring no remedy (cf. 13:10).

(10:4) The people's lack of respect for the Lord was illustrated by their lack of regard for legal agreements they made with each other. Their attitude toward fellow Israelites (including frequently taking each other to court) simply reflected their lack of loyalty to God.

(10:5-6) Some details of the approaching judgment and exile are described in verses 5-8. The calf-idol (cf. comments on 8:5) located in Beth-aven (Bethel) would be carried away by the victorious Assyrian army, causing great consternation among its worshipers. The Hebrew word *'āwen*, spelled slightly differently, is "**Beth-aven,**" the derogatory name for Bethel (cf. Hosea 4:15; 5:8; 10:5). Idolatrous "priests" translates a rare term (*kemārīm*), used only of priests of Baal (2 Kings 23:5; Zeph. 1:4). The reference to the Assyrian army carrying off the idols of defeated foes is abundantly illustrated in neo-Assyrian literature and art. The great king refers to Assyria's king (cf. Hosea 8:10).

(10:7) Israel's king (cf. vv. 3, 15), as well as her calf-idol, would be removed in the coming invasion. Like foam floating on the water, the nation would be swept away by the current and brought to ruin.

(10:8) The sites of idolatrous worship would be destroyed as well, the ruins becoming overgrown with thorns (cf. 9:6) and thistles. The reference to the destruction of the high places (*bāmôt*) is ironic (cf. Lev. 26:30-31). When Israel entered the land the Lord commanded her to destroy these worship centers (Num. 33:52; Deut. 12:2-3). **Because of Israel's dismal failure in carrying out this charge, the Lord chose to use a foreign army to accomplish His purpose.** In utter desperation the people would beg the mountains to fall on them. A similar plea will be made by unbelievers in the Tribulation in response to the terror of God's wrath in the seal judgments (Rev. 6:16).

(10:9) Hosea referred again to the shameful incident at Gibeah (cf. 9:9). Since that time Israel had persisted in sin. How appropriate that judgment should "overtake" the city that had served as a pattern for Israel's sinful history!

(10:10) At the time of the Lord's choosing (*when He desires*) He would chastise (lit., "discipline"; cf. 5:2) Israel by gathering the nations against her. The imagery is that of plowing (cf. v. 11). Israel is pictured as yoked to her sin like a heifer (cf. Isa. 5:18). Israel's two furrows or "double sin" probably refers to Israel's former sin (at Gibeah) and her present guilt.

(10:11) The comparison of Israel to a cow is continued (cf. comments on v. 10). Israel (Ephraim stands for the Northern Kingdom) was like a trained heifer that loves to thresh. A heifer would like to thresh because threshing was a comparatively light task, made pleasant by the fact that the creature was unmuzzled and free to eat ... as it pulled the threshing sledge over the gathered corn. **However, Israel had abandoned this relatively easy task and had insisted on being yoked, as it were, to sin (cf. 10:10b).**

So the Lord would place a different yoke on Israel's neck and force her to engage in the extremely arduous work of plowing. Even Judah was included in this judgment. Jacob referred to the Northern Kingdom (cf. 12:2). In this figurative portrayal the nation's threshing corresponded to the service the Lord required within the covenant relationship, whereas the plowing referred to the hardship that would accompany the exile.

(10:12) A brief call to covenant loyalty is included here. Even in the midst of a message of condemnation and judgment God held out the possibility of repentance and blessing (cf. Isa. 1:18-20). Using agricultural imagery, He urged Israel to seek the LORD by cultivating righteousness (justice) and reaping His unfailing mercy (*hesed*, "loyalty"). The words "rain righteousness" compare God's future gift of righteousness (or just treatment in the form of deliverance; cf. Hosea 2:19) to abundant rain (cf. 6:3).

(10:13) The exhortation in verse 12 actually summarizes the appeal made by Israel's prophets throughout her history. But the sinful nation had not responded properly, producing instead wickedness (cf. v. 15), evil, and deception. Rather than relying on the power of God, the nation had depended on her own military might. The contrast between God's desires and Israel's response heightens her guilt. So the call to repentance (v. 12) had a twofold function: *it testified to the Lord's grace and contributed to the development of the prophet's accusation.*

(10:14-15) In response to Israel's pride the Lord said He would destroy a source of her false confidence (fortresses; cf. 8:14). The severity of the judgment is emphasized by a comparison with a historical incident that was apparently well known to Hosea's contemporaries. But the identity of Shalman and the location of Beth-arbel are uncertain. The most popular identifications of Shalman have been: (a) Shalmaneser III (an Assyrian ruler who campaigned against the West), (b) Shalmaneser V (the Assyrian ruler, and (c) Salamanu (a Moabite king mentioned in a tribute list of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III and a contemporary of Hosea). Beth-arbel has been identified by some (e.g., Eusebius) with modern Irbid (Arbela) in the northern Transjordan region about 18 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee and by others with modern Arbel two miles west of the Sea of Galilee (Arbela in the apocryphal 1 Maccabees 9:2). At any rate this particular battle was vividly remembered for its atrocities, especially the wholesale slaughter of women and children. Bethel, which here represents the nation as a whole, would experience a similar fate because of her great sin (cf. Hosea 4:15; Amos 7:10-17). The fall of Israel's king would signal the conquest of the nation by Babylon (cf. Hosea 10:3, 7; 2 Kings 17:4-6).

Israel's ingratitude punished (Ch. 11:1-7)

(11:1-2) Once again the Lord recalled Israel's early history to contrast the past with the present (cf. 9:10; 10:1). At the beginning the Lord's relationship with Israel had been like that of a father to a son (cf. Ex. 4:22-23). *Compare this verse with Matthew 2:15.* The Lord displayed His love toward the nation by summoning her from Egypt (cf. Deut. 7:8; also cf. Hosea 12:9, 13; 13:4). However, when God subsequently called them (11:2) to covenant obedience through His prophets, the people rejected Him (cf. Jer. 7:25-26) and turned instead to false gods (cf. 2 Kings 17:13-17) including the Baals (lords) (cf. Hosea 2:13, 17). Hosea 11:2a could be paraphrased, "**The more they** [i.e., the prophets] **called them, the more they** [the Israelites] **went from them.**"

(11:3-4) The Lord's goodness to Israel is further illustrated. Like a father patiently teaching a young child to walk, the Lord had established and sustained Israel (cf. Deut. 1:31; Isa. 1:2). **He also healed (restored) the nation's strength after times of judgment**, though she failed to acknowledge His intervention. Compare this with the endless cycle of defeat and restoration in the book of Judges.

In Hosea 11:4 Israel is compared to a **work animal** (cf. 10:11). The Lord is likened to a master who gently (in kindness and love; cf. 11:1) leads his animal and removes (or perhaps repositions) its yoke so that it might eat with greater ease the food he kindly provides (Mt. 11:28-30). The Lord treated Israel with compassion and love.

(11:5-7) Astonishingly Israel had responded to the Lord's kindness with **ingratitude** (cf. vv. 2, 3b). Even when the Lord called her to repentance through His prophets they refused to repent (cf. v. 7). Therefore inescapable judgment would fall in the form of military defeat and exile (vv. 5a, 6). Once again Egypt is named as a **symbol** (*not another literal Egyptian bondage*) of slavery and exile (cf. 8:13; 9:3, 6). Israel was simply following her "**own counsels.**"

As in earlier sections of this prophecy, Hosea's message of judgment concludes with an abrupt shift to a message of salvation (cf. 1:10-2:1; 2:14-3:5; 5:15-6:3). These verses should not be understood as a decision to withhold the judgment threatened uncompromisingly throughout the book. Instead, the words are a divine response to Israel's suffering and exile. The Lord would not totally abandon Israel. The effects of His wrath would be tempered by His compassion, and He would ultimately call His people back from exile.

The Lord's love for Israel (11:8-9)

(11:8-9) One of the Bible's strongest expressions of divine emotion is in these verses. As God reflected on the severe judgment that His wrath would bring on Israel, He suddenly burst out with four rhetorical questions. They indicate that He would never completely desert His people. **Admah and Zeboim**, which were annihilated along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23), were symbols of complete divine destruction.

Instead of carrying out His fierce (*burning*) anger to the fullest, God's compassion would be aroused. The burning flame of God's anger would be replaced, as it were, by the fire of His compassion. Ephraim would never again experience the judgment of God. This promise is reliable because it was made by the Holy One (cf. Hosea 11:12) Himself, who condescends to dwell with His people and yet continues to transcend all that is human and fallible (*He is not a man*; 1 Sam. 15:29).

Israel's return to the Lord and concluding indictment (11:10-12)

(11:10-11) In the day of national restoration Israel will follow the LORD, who will lead the people back to their homes. His lion-like roar, often associated with judgment and destruction (cf. 5:14; 13:7; Amos 1:2; 3:8), will become a summons to return from exile. The people will again demonstrate a healthy respect for the LORD; they will come trembling (cf. Hosea 3:5 for a similar idea), as an earlier generation did when God appeared in theophanic might at Mount Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:16, where the same Heb. word is used).

The comparison to doves is significant in light of Hosea 7:11, where Israel's **naïveté** in seeking foreign alliances is likened to that of a dove. Here the force of the simile is positive, the reference being to the swiftness with which the dove returns to its nest (cf. Ps. 55:6-8; Isa. 60:8). Again Egypt represents exile. Restoration from Assyria is also mentioned in Zechariah 10:10-11.

(11:12) The entire nation had broken her covenant with the Lord. **Lies** and **deceit** refer to **hypocrisy** and **unfaithfulness**. The word '**deceit**' (*mirmâh*) is especially appropriate in light of the following comparison with the patriarch Jacob (cf. 12:3-4, 12). The same term was used to describe Jacob's deception in stealing Esau's blessing (cf. Gen. 27:35).

Ironically the nation was unfaithful to the faithful Holy One, who had always demonstrated fidelity to His covenant promises (cf. Hosea 12:9; 13:4-6). "*Compasseth about with lies*" (*rûd*) means to stray or roam restlessly, an apt picture of Israel's wandering off from God to Baal and to foreign nations for help. "**Holy One**" is plural here (Cf. 12:4 'with us'), emphasizing the **magnitude** of this divine characteristic (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). In this context God's holiness refers primarily to His transcendence over fallible people (cf. 11:9). The last line of this chapter gives a passing glimpse of **Judah's faithfulness** (*temporarily*) as compared to **Israel's unfaithfulness**. Sadly, however, the **leaven of idolatry** would also spread quickly to the Southern Kingdom.

(12:1-2) Israel's unfaithfulness found expression in social injustice ('she increaseth lies and desolation'; cf. 4:2; 7:1) and in foreign alliances with Assyria and Egypt (cf. 5:13; 7:8, 11; 8:8-9; 2 Kings 17:3-4). **Olive oil was either used in the covenant-making ceremony or given as a token of allegiance.** All this activity was **futile** and self-destructive, as the references to feeding on and pursuing the wind suggest (cf. Hosea 8:7; 13:15). The LORD had a controversy "charge" (*rîb*; cf. 4:1; also see comments on 2:2) against Judah and was about to punish His people for their evil ways.

A lesson from history (12:3-6)

Before further developing the themes of guilt and judgment (cf. 12:9-13:16), Hosea reminded the nation of her need to repent (12:5-6). In doing so he drew a lesson from the life of **Jacob** (vv. 3-4).

(12:3-4) Jacob's birth gave a hint of the kind of person he would be. His grasping Esau's heel (cf. Gen. 25:26) foreshadowed his deception of his brother in 'stealing' his birthright and blessing (cf. Gen. 27:35-36). **However, Jacob eventually came to a turning point.** When he faced the prospect of death at Esau's hand on his return to the land of Canaan he wrestled with God, refusing to let go till he received a blessing (Gen. 32:22-32). Later at Bethel, the site of his dream years before (cf. Gen. 28:10-22), God appeared to Jacob again. God changed his name to Israel, blessed him, and renewed His covenant promise (cf. Gen. 35:1-14).

(12:5-6) Like Jacob, the deceitful nation (cf. 11:12) needed to return (12:6) to her covenant Ruler, the LORD God Almighty with tears and prayers (cf. v. 4). Genuine repentance would involve a commitment to mercy (*hesed*) and judgment, as well as a dependence on the Lord (*wait on thy God continually*; cf. Ps. 27:14), rather than on herself.

(12:7-8) Israel's **repentance** (v. 6) would necessitate a complete **reversal** in her dealings and attitudes. The nation was permeated by economic dishonesty (*mirmâh*; cf. 11:12 for the same word), oppression (defraud), pride (Ephraim boasts), and insensitivity to her sin, thinking that her wealth would hide her sin. The Old Testament frequently spoke against using scales that were rigged to weigh out less merchandise than the buyer thought he was getting (cf. Lev. 19:36; Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23; Amos 8:5; Micah 6:11).

(12:9) The LORD, however, would not overlook such blatant disobedience and ingratitude. As their God, He had guided the nation since her days in Egypt, leading her through the wilderness to the Promised Land. As part of His coming judgment He would bring Israel into the wilderness again, making her live in tabernacles (tents.) The wilderness experience, which the people commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev. 23:33-43), would be realized once more in the Exile.

(12:10-11) Though the Lord had communicated His will to Israel through the prophets, the people had repudiated those messages. The wickedness and hypocrisy manifested in Gilead (cf. 6:8) and Gilgal (cf. 4:15; 9:15) epitomized that of the nation. In the coming invasion the altars located there would be reduced to piles of stones (*gallîm*; cf. 10:8, "the altars are as heaps").

(12:12-13) The Lord's past goodness is again recalled. Going back to Jacob's experience once more (cf. vv. 3-4), Hosea reminded the people of their humble beginnings. Their famous ancestor was once a refugee who had to tend sheep in order to acquire a wife (cf. Deut. 26:5). Later Jacob's descendants served the Egyptians till God delivered them from Egypt (cf. Hosea 11:1; 12:9; 13:4) and protected them through His prophet Moses.

(12:14) However, Israel had provoked the Lord to anger with her sin. Hosea probably was alluding here to idolatry because *kā'as*, the verb rendered "**provoked him to anger**," is frequently used in reference to idols (cf., e.g., Deut. 4:25; 9:18; 31:29; 32:16, 21; Jud. 2:12; 1 Kings 14:9, 15). In response to this the LORD would not extend forgiveness (He would leave upon the nation its guilt; cf. Hosea 10:2; 13:12, 16); He would repay her for her evil.

Impending doom (Ch. 13)

(13:1-3) Ephraim's prominent (exalted) place among the tribes of Israel was well known (cf. Gen. 48:13-20). Jeroboam I, who had led the Northern Kingdom's secession, was an Ephraimite (1 Kings 11:26; 12:25). However, this prominent tribe had also taken the lead in Baal worship and was as good as dead. As the Ephraimites (and the other Israelites they represent here) multiplied their idols and images, they added to their guilt. They debased themselves even further by kissing the calf-idols (cf. 1 Kings 19:18; also cf. "calf-idol" in Hosea 8:4-5; 10:5) in conjunction with their many sacrificial rites. In this case the prophet (Hosea 13:2) was emphasizing the absurdity of *men* kissing images of calves. The judgment of God would make these idolaters quickly vanish (v. 3). **Each of the four similes (cloud ... dew; cf. 6:4, chaff . . smoke) emphasizes the extremely transitory condition of the idolaters.**

(13:4-9) Once more the LORD reminded Israel of His gracious deeds at the beginning of their history (cf. 12:9a, 10, 12-13). He led them from Egypt (cf. 11:1; 12:9, 13), cared for (lit., "knew") them in the wilderness (13:5) and allowed them to feed in the Promised Land (v. 6). It describes sheep or cattle grazing peacefully. In return for such blessings they should have acknowledged the Lord as their God and Savior (v. 4). Instead they became proud and forgot Him (v. 6; cf. comments on 2:13). Like a vicious and powerful wild beast (*lion ... leopard, or bear*) the Lord would attack His people (still viewed here as a helpless flock or herd, 13:7-8; cf. 5:14). ***Ironically the Helper of Israel would become her Destroyer because she was against Him (13:9).***

(13:10-11) When the Lord would come to destroy (v. 9) no one would be able to save the people, not even the political leaders they had demanded from the Lord (v. 10; cf. 10:3, 7, 15). Hosea 13:11a (in My anger I gave you a king) probably refers to the Northern tribes' part in crowning Saul (1 Sam. 8:6-9; 12:12), as well as their secession under Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:16). Hosea 13:11b refers to the cessation of Israel's kingship with Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1-6).

(13:12) God had not overlooked Israel's guilt (cf. 10:2; 12:14; 13:16). Ephraim's sinful deeds were compared to a document which is bound up and a treasure which is stored up. Through both figures Israel's sins were pictured as something guarded carefully till the day of retribution when they would be brought forth as testimony against the nation.

(13:13) Any basis for hope had all but disappeared. Israel had not responded to God's call for repentance during the period of grace He had extended. The procrastinating nation was compared to a baby which does not come out of its mother's womb despite her strenuous efforts in labor. **Such a delay will result in death for both mother and child.** Since the baby seemingly does not observe the proper time for his birth, he is referred to, figuratively, as without wisdom (cf. Ecc. 8:5).

(13:14) Traditionally verse 14a has been interpreted as an expression of hope and a promise of salvation. Compare this also with the New Testament statements concerning God's victory over death through the experience of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah (1 Cor. 15).

(13:15-16) With the Lord's compassion removed (v. 14; cf. 1:6), Israel's prosperity (*fruitful*) would come to an end. The LORD would come like a hot east wind which dries up everything in its path. **The reality behind the figure is the Assyrian invasion, as the references to plundering and military atrocities make clear.** Thus 13:15-16 correspond to the plagues and destruction of death mentioned in verse 14. The language is that of covenant curse (cf. Lev. 26:25; Deut. 28:21; 32:24-25; Amos 4:10). Again destruction would come, God said, because Israel had rebelled against Him (cf. Hosea 7:13; 8:1).

An appeal for repentance (14:1-3)

(14:1-3) Hosea's prophecy ends on a positive note with an exhortation to repentance (Return ... to the LORD). Though this final appeal would surely be rejected by His arrogant and stubborn nation (cf. 10:12-15), it would instill hope in the hearts of a righteous remnant and provide the repentant generation of the future with a model to follow in returning to the Lord (cf. 3:5; 5:15b-6:3). True repentance would involve an acknowledgment of sin (*Say to Him, Take away all iniquity*) and a desire to praise the Lord (*so will we render the calves of our lips*), Israel's only Savior, God, and Helper (contrast 5:13; 7:11; 8:4-5, 9; 13:2). No longer will Israel trust in Assyria or other nations, or will she call her hand-made idols our gods.

A promise of restoration (14:4-8)

(14:4-6) In the day of Israel's repentance the Lord will turn from His anger and demonstrate His love by healing her (cf. 6:1). At that time the Lord's blessing will return to Israel. Like ... dew it will cause the nation to blossom like a lily which was renowned for its beauty (cf. Song 2:2). This is a complete reversal of the imagery used in Hosea 13:15. Israel in her prosperity is also compared to a cedar of Lebanon, whose deep roots, luxuriant growth, and aromatic smell (cf. Song 4:11) were well known; and to an olive tree, widely recognized for its luxuriance (cf. Ps. 52:8; Jer. 11:16).

(14:7) His shadow (or shade) could refer to the Lord's protection (cf. v. 8, where He is compared to a "fir tree"; also cf. Isa. 4:6). The picture of Israelites again growing grain points to the return of covenantal blessing (cf. Deut. 28:4, 8, 11; 30:9; Hosea 2:21-23; Amos 9:13-15). Once again Israel will be "like a" fruitful "vine" (cf. Hosea 10:1) which produces the best "wine."

(14:8) The first statement, "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" The contrast with Ephraim's earlier attitude is stark (cf. 2:8; 4:17; 8:4-6; 13:2). The Lord speaks in the latter half of 14:8 proclaiming His concern for Israel. The words care for translate the same Hebrew word (*šûr*) as "**observe/lurk**" in 13:7. **The same God who stealthily watched Israel like a leopard ready to pounce on its prey will become the One who carefully watches over His people to protect them!** Comparing Himself to a green fir tree, the Lord also asserted that He is the nation's source of prosperity: your fruitfulness comes from Me.

A word of wisdom (14:9)

(14:9) The book ends with a word of wisdom. One who is wise and discerning will learn a **threefold** lesson from Hosea's message. **The ways of the LORD** (i.e., His covenantal demands) **are right. The righteous walk in** (i.e., obey; cf. Deut. 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 28:9; Jud. 2:17) **them and experience the blessings of loyalty. The rebellious** (cf. Hosea 7:13; 8:1; 13:16) **stumble over (not in) them** in the sense that destruction (fall) is the direct result of disobedience. The broken commandments become the ultimate reason for their downfall (cf. 5:5; 14:1). **May all who read Hosea's words walk, not stumble and fall!**