

Return to Love and Justice

Bible Background • Hosea 11

Printed Text • Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10; 12:1–2, 6–14 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 72:1–17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPARE prosperity as a worldly goal with the godly virtues of love and justice; REGRET the occasions where we have made material prosperity a greedy, covetous goal; and PRACTICE love and justice as key virtues.

In Focus

Sixteen-year-old twins Briana and Jackson and their family just wanted some warm food. Their father had lost his job, and their mom was sick. They wanted to eat and would volunteer to clean up in exchange for food. The twins left their two-bedroom apartment and their two siblings to find the family food.

They stopped at a church a few blocks away and asked if the church was still serving meals. The church said they were but the kitchen closed in 20 minutes. Jackson ran back to tell everyone, but their mother was too weak to go inside. Their father stayed with her and told the other kids to go. The children thought they would ask to take food for their parents.

To their surprise, they were told they could not take extras. Briana and Jackson managed to sneak bread and fruit in their pockets. The church's sign read, "We Are A Caring Church." Briana said, "They sure don't represent the care of God too well. Maybe the church down the street with the broken sign that simply read "All Are Welcome" might mean it."

Have you ever met or experienced rejection from people who claim to love the Lord? How are churches and believers guilty of saying they love the Lord, but not always displaying their love in genuine and meaningful ways?

Keep in Mind

"So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him" (Hosea 12:6, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Backsliding (11:7) meshuvah (Heb.)— Back-turning, apostasy

B. Turn (12:6) shuv (Heb.)—To turn back, retreat, to change course or direction

Say It Correctly

Ephraim. EEF-ram.

Assyria. ah-SEE-ree-ah.

Admah. awd-MAH.

Zeboim. zeh-boe-EEM.

KJV

Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. 10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

12:1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.

NLT

Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt.

2 But the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols.

7 For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me.

8 "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.

9 No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy.

10 For someday the people will follow me. I, the LORD, will roar like a lion. And when I roar, my people will return trembling from the west.

12:1 The people of Israel feed on the wind; they chase after the east wind all day long. They pile up lies and violence; they are making an alliance with Assyria while sending olive oil to buy support from Egypt.

2 Now the LORD is bringing charges against Judah. He is about to punish Jacob for all his deceitful ways, and pay him back for all he has done.

6 So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him.

7 But no, the people are like crafty merchants selling from dishonest scales—they love to cheat.

8 Israel boasts, "I am rich! I've made a fortune all by myself! No one has caught me cheating! My record is spotless!"

9 But I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. And I will make you live in tents again, as you do each year at the Festival of Shelters.

10 I sent my prophets to warn you with many visions and parables."

11 But the people of Gilead are worthless because of their idol worship. And in Gilgal, too, they sacrifice bulls; their altars are lined up like the heaps of stone along the edges of a plowed field.

12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram, and there he earned a wife by tending sheep.

13 Then by a prophet the LORD brought Jacob's descendants out of Egypt; and by that prophet they were protected.

14 But the people of Israel have bitterly provoked the LORD, so their LORD will now sentence them to death in payment for their sins.

The People, Places, and Times

Hosea. One of the minor prophets. He was an Old Testament prophet of the eighth century BC, called by God from the northern kingdom. He prophesied about the last forty years before the fall of the northern kingdom, warning the Israelites to return to God before it was too late. He was an older contemporary of Isaiah and Micah and began His ministry at a time when Israel was prosperous and powerful under King Jeroboam II (790–749 BC).

Background

The book of Hosea illustrates a time when the people of Israel had been unfaithful to God through worship. They sought out relationships with Assyria and Egypt that were not approved by God, all in pursuit of military gain, and subjected themselves to improper worship of Baal. Throughout the story of Hosea, God has shown His commitment to the people of Israel, and yet they continue to both reject His love and disobey His commands. The northern kingdom managed only two centuries remaining vibrant and alive, in large part because its leaders failed to teach the people of Israel how to seek and follow after God. Hosea predicted the downfall of Israel when Shalmaneser of Assyria conquered it and shortly after Judah went into captivity. In many ways, today's passages show how God is lamenting the frustrations of a people who continued to defile the meaning of worship. In chapter 12, Jacob, who later was renamed Israel, practiced deceit and yet was the common ancestor of all the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob, however, diligent in his desire to seek God, wrestled with the angel to receive his blessings. Jacob's ancestors named in this text remained under the belief that their benefits would be a direct result of their success, without help from God. Jacob attempted to cleanse his home of idol worship (Genesis 35:2); however, his decedents remained steadfast in their worshiping of idols. As result, dishonesty, as noted by Jacob's past, became the norm in how people attained their wealth.

At-A-Glance

1. Israel's Deliverance (Hosea 11:1–2)
2. God's Reaffirming Love (vv. 7–10)
3. The Punishment of Israel (12:1–2)
4. Seek God's Love and Justice (vv. 6–14)

In Depth

1. Israel's Deliverance (Hosea 11:1–2)

God has in many ways envisioned the relationship that He maintained with Israel as similar to that of a parent and a stubborn child. God reemphasizes the love He possesses for His children despite the many times that the children of Israel continuously disobeyed God even after being brought out of Egypt (vv. 1–2). God continued to restore the people of Israel, and in many ways, this sets up the narrative for the Messiah that would come and offer reconciliation and hope.

What does the hope of a Messiah (Jesus) offer to the future of the people of Israel?

2. God's Reaffirming Love (vv. 7–10)

God reminds the Israelites what happened to Admah and Zeboim (NLT: Zeboim), who both perished with Sodom and Gomorrah, yet God refuses to allow that to happen to the people of Israel. God remains adamant in His refusal to destroy Israel by reaffirming love and not anger. Instead of God's wrath (which would have been justified), God states that His "compassion is aroused." This is a reminder to the people of Israel of God's divine position. We cannot place our definitions of human characteristics onto how we understand God's behavior. God is infinitely larger than we could imagine, so when we note God's love despite our disobedience, we cannot attempt to rationalize it with our human understanding. God believed in the return of faithful people (vv. 10–11).

How do we come to understand God's divine love through His relationship with the people of Israel?

3. The Punishment of Israel (12:1–2)

At different times, Assyria and Egypt each conquered Israel and held their people captive, yet Israel still tries to make alliances and trade deals with them. Israel continues to use all forms of deceit and violence in pursuit of power. In many ways, these actions remain in direct conflict to the bondage that they were set free from as a people. Pursuit of their wishes and desires caused the people of Israel to fall. God at this moment is calling out Jacob and the people of Israel for their deceit and the deceit of his descendants who believed that their successes came from their works. God is now calling to bring a charge against the people of Israel; however, this charge is coming from His continued love for them.

Do you think that it would have been better to have the people of Israel destroyed to understand the seriousness of their actions?

4. Seek God's Love and Justice (vv. 6–14)

God urges the people of Israel once again to return to the ways of love and justice. They must put away the deceit and harm they have displayed since their release from Egypt. The boasting of riches and wealth is not rooted in justice or love, nor does it carry weight in God's kingdom. God reminds the Israelites of the Festival of Booths, a time when they spend a week living in tents to honor God's protection when they wandered the wilderness for forty years. However, God warns the people of Israel that if they continue to live in such a way that glorifies material success and idol worship, they would be sent back to the tents and placed in bondage.

How can one obtain wealth in a way that is still affirming of God's love and justice?

Search the Scriptures

1. How does Israel try to establish their own prosperity apart from God (Hosea 12:1)?
2. Usually, people run from the roar of a lion. What will hearers do when they hear God's lionlike roar (Hosea 11:10)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Note the times in your life where you found yourself disobeying God and idolizing other things. How did God extend His love and mercy to you even at that time?
2. How do you understand success in any area of your life as it relates to your relationship with God?
3. Do you find yourself seeking love and justice even if the people and communities you love initially reject you?

Liberating Lesson

There are individuals and corporations in this country who continue to profit from deceit and improper business practices. These individuals and corporations find themselves hoping to obtain worldly wealth and prosperity. Meanwhile, they continue to widen the wealth gap globally. Their desire to achieve power, status, and wealth

by human means has allowed them to lose sight of the destruction that they are causing to working class and poor people. In many ways, God is still calling out to them, both in love and strong rebuke. God desires all His children, even those that operate in deceit and material wealth, to bring justice and restore good order. We can often find ourselves seeking to obtain the material wealth of millionaires, meanwhile forgetting the reasons God blesses us with wealth in the first place. We have been given wealth so that we may extend back the same love God has shown us and share it among the least of these and work toward restorative economic justice.

Application for Activation

Always seek God daily in every aspect of your life. Ensure that you are keeping God at the head of your life (Matthew 6:33). Ask yourself, what are you faithful to? What do you find yourself idolizing? You can also examine if the blessings that God has provided you should be redistributed to those around you in need. Lastly, seek to trust God to continue being a provider in your life and not to trust in your own ability to provide.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10; 12:1–2, 6–14

Prophet Hosea lived during the tragic final days of Israel, the Northern Kingdom before their exile to Assyria. The book uses a number of symbols to depict Israel’s unfaithfulness on the one hand, and God’s gracious, merciful, and persistently loving character on the other. It uses marriage and parenting metaphors—Israel as a promiscuous wife and an ungrateful or stubborn child—to show the people’s unfaithfulness. Nonetheless, Israel’s (or humanity’s) unfaithfulness and stubbornness are not enough to exhaust God’s redeeming grace, love, and mercy toward His people. While the imagery of the married, unfaithful, and wayward prostitute is used in the opening chapters of the book (chapters 1–3), the metaphor of a rebellious child is used in the eleventh chapter to depict Israel’s disloyalty toward God. In spite of Israel’s waywardness and rebellion, God’s unparalleled character of love, mercy, justice, and grace is constantly displayed (11:1–11).

1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. 2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

Chapter 11 begins with the imagery of a court of law where God as His own witness seems to state His case, as it were, against His people, Israel. Indeed, this sounds more like a lament of a father who is disappointed over his son’s behavior than a charge against his own son. The Lord calls to mind His fatherly dealings with Israel and their stubbornness and rebellion against Him. Here we have a picture of a father’s tender love for his child—the Lord as the father and Israel the child—a picture He often employs to describe His relationship with Israel (Exodus 4:22–23; Isaiah 1:2–4). The phrase “When Israel was a child, then I loved him” refers to the formative years of Israel as a nation in Egypt during and after the time of Joseph and his generation. The

Hebrew verb translated “love” here is ’ahav (aw-HAHV), which means “to have affection,” with the idea to like or to have a close and intimate relationship.

The effect of God’s loving affection for Israel is both implicitly and explicitly stated. Firstly, implicitly stated, “then I loved him” implies the Lord blessed Israel economically and numerically multiplied them after the death of Joseph and his generation (Exodus 1:6–10). The Egyptians’ envious response resulted in the imposition of hard labor, torture, and bondage of Israel under the Egyptians. Secondly, explicitly expressed, God demonstrated His love for Israel by redeeming them from their bondage in Egypt—known as the Exodus. This is captured in the phrase “out of Egypt.” Egypt is geographically, spiritually, and symbolically used here. Egypt was the geographical land from where Israel is physically liberated; it also symbolized idolatry, the worship of many gods and idols from which the Lord delivered Israel. In addition, Egypt represented bondage, torture, and suffering. The phrase, therefore, speaks of complete deliverance from bondage to new life in the Promised Land. The phrase is quoted concerning Jesus (Matthew 2:15). The love that led Him to deliver Israel from Egypt is the same that made Him bring His Son from Egypt to do the work of redemption among His people.

However, Israel did not appreciate or reciprocate God’s love for them. Rather the more He loved and called them, the further they wandered away from God and worshiped the images of Baal (vv. 2–4). The translation of verse 2 appears problematic. KJV renders it “As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim and burned incense to graven images.” The plural pronouns “they” or “them” probably refer to the prophets whom God used to call His “son,” Israel, to return to Him. Other translations including NLT translate it “... the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols.” The singular pronoun “I” tends to point to God as the one speaking. Whether spoken by God or His prophets, the main issue here is Israel’s obstinacy and waywardness.

As noted above, God called or delivered Israel both spiritually and physically out of Egypt (v. 2). God’s main purpose for the Exodus was to separate Israel from the worship of idols and to establish an intimate relationship with them. Several times, God instructs Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to “Let my people go, so that they may worship me” (Exodus 5:1, 8:1, 9:1, 10:1). God recalls how the Israelites constantly rejected Him and followed other gods throughout their journey to the Promised Land. Instead of worshiping the Lord who showed them, love, they wandered farther from Him; they followed Baal by sacrificing to it and “burning incense to graven images.”

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

In spite of God’s tender love and care for Israel (vv. 3–4), and warning of exile to Assyrian for refusing to repent (vv. 5–6), Israel (Ephraim) continues to rebel and reject God. The phrase “And my people are bent to backsliding from me” is a statement of disappointment by a father who loved his children. It points back to the efforts God made to keep the relationship between Him and His people alive. But the more He tried to make it work, the more they are habitually determined (“bent,” KJV) to walk away from Him. The word “backsliding” comes from the Hebrew noun meshuvah (mehshoo- VAW), which means back-turning or apostasy. This word comes from the root shuv (Heb. SHOOV), which will be used positively in Hosea’s next prophecy (see 12:6 below). God wants them to turn back to Him, but they are turning away from Him instead. The clause “though they called them to the most High” refers to the effort made (by the prophets) to turn Israel back to the most High, but they remain adamant. None of them would extol or honor Him.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. 9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

Like a spoiled child, Israel habitually turned away from God, deliberately dishonoring the Lord their God. Israel justifiably deserved the severest punishment possible, and God was obligated to fulfill that part of the covenant

(Deuteronomy 8:19–20). Like a stubborn son who would not listen to his parents, Israel was totally rebellious toward God, their Father. According to Jewish law, a defiant son was supposed to be turned over to the elders of the city and stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18–21). An earthly father could give up his son. However, since God is infinitely just and infinitely merciful, the two attributes are seemingly in conflict. Here mercy wins!

Rhetorically, as a father filled with love, compassion, and mercy, the Lord questions Israel. Here are two sets of parallelism, a feature common in Hebrew poetry. The first is “give thee up, Ephraim” with “deliver thee, Israel,” and the second is “make thee as Admah” with “set thee as Zeboim.” Each refers to one action. “Ephraim” was the second son of Joseph, one of the northern tribes of Israel. Ephraim and Israel here represent the Northern Kingdom; it means that all the inhabitants of the northern tribes were guilty. There was a breakdown of the discipline of the northern tribes; therefore, all deserved to be disciplined. To give them up or deliver them is tantamount to doing to them as was done to Admah and Zeboim—total destruction of the land and the people. Admah and Zeboim were among the five cities in the plain that included Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:2), which were totally destroyed (Genesis 18:16–19:20; Deuteronomy 29:22–23). Israel rightly deserved similar punishment. However, as He agonizes on this and envisioned what the outcome would be, God’s heart of compassion takes over. He says His heart has “turned” (Heb. hafak, haw-FAWK, to change or transform), meaning He has changed His mind. The phrase “my repentings are kindled together” expresses the intensity of His compassion. The word for “repentings” is elsewhere translated “comfort” and refers to mercy or compassion. The idea of being “kindled together” is also used to describe times of great emotional distress (Genesis 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26).

The questions He poses in verse 8 are answered in verse 9. The Lord affirms, “I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim” (from v. 9). Here the Lord displays His characteristics of mercy and constancy. What seems like a change in God’s action is in accordance with His eternal purpose of love and mercy for His people. In addition to deep compassion, faithfulness to His unconditional covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3) motivated the Lord to spare Israel from total destruction. However, His covenant with Israel at Sinai was conditional. If they failed to meet those conditions, God was obligated to withhold His blessings. Israel’s possession of land with its blessings was based on the Abrahamic Covenant, but their enjoyment was based on the Mosaic Covenant. God was faithful to both covenants: He preserved the nation, but He disciplined them for their sins. The phrase “the Holy One in the midst of thee” confirms His faithfulness and constant presence to protect and preserve them in keeping with His covenant. The phrase “I will not enter into the city” means that He would not enter the city as He did to Admah and Zeboim and destroy them in anger.

10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

In the Scriptures, God’s pronouncement of judgment is often immediately followed with a promise of hope. So is the case here. Here Hosea prophesies a better relationship between Israel and their God. They “shall walk after the Lord” means they will follow the ways of the Lord, in contrast to their former life of rebellion and obstinacy. Then the Lord “shall roar like a lion,” not in the sense of hostility for destruction (5:14; 13:7), but as a signal and a call of return from captivity: both physically from exile and spiritually from sin. They would come from the west including the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt. God calls people from everywhere to repentance.

12:1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. 2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

Hosea continues God’s charge against Ephraim (i.e., Israel) for their waywardness. Using the figure of speech of wind, Hosea describes Israel’s pursuit of vain things and their false reliance on humans rather than their God. The phrase “Ephraim feedeth on wind” means to eagerly strive after empty or worthless things. The “wind” is ruakh (ROO-akh), generally associated with air or breath and synonymous with emptiness. Not only do they

purse vain things, but they also followed “after the east wind.” The east wind, used figuratively here, is particularly destructive to this area since it blows in from the desert bringing searing heat with it. It represents not only the pursuit of the vain things but the ruin Israel is bringing upon itself (cf. Job 27:21). How does Israel do this? They increase daily in “lies and desolation”—continually deepening in falsehood and violence (see 4:1–2). Furthermore, they sought an alliance with worldly powers—Assyria and Egypt—hoping to secure help (5:13). Also, King Hoshea of Israel rebelled against Assyria by covenanting with Egypt. But this backfired. This led to the destruction of Israel and its capture by Assyria (2 Kings 17:3–6).

Verse 2 focuses on the sin of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Although their sin seemed lighter (11:12), Judah was equally guilty and deserved discipline. The clause “The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah” means that the Lord has a charge against Judah. He “will punish Jacob according to his ways.” Jacob, who was later named Israel, was the ancestor of all twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, the two kingdoms, here being represented by “Jacob” will be punished according to their deeds; none will go unpunished. Verses 3–5 give a brief history of Jacob. Like his descendants, Jacob practiced deceit. But in contrast to Israel and Judah, Jacob sought God. Jacob rid his house of idols (Genesis 35:2), but his descendants could not give up their idol worship.

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

After laying the charge against Judah and Israel, Hosea calls on them for a change of heart and direction. “Therefore,” he says “turn thou to thy God.” The word “turn” is the Hebrew *shuv* (SHOOV), which means to turn back or retreat. It has the idea of changing a course or direction one was taking and turning to another. They have consistently wandered away from the God of their forefather Jacob, and now He wants them to turn back to Yahweh. To do that would mean to “keep mercy and judgment.” Mercy and justice are the very foundation of God’s principles. They are fundamentally required of all followers of God; they define a proper relationship with the Almighty (6:6; Micah 6:8). Jesus refers to these as “the weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23). To do these, they must “wait on thy God continually.” This is a call to total surrender, hope, and reliance on God for strength. “Continually” has the idea of a consistent relationship with the Lord by keeping the precepts as children of the living God.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. 8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

Here Hosea mentions some of the sins that the people of Israel had committed: using dishonesty in business (12:7), defrauding people to make more money, and oppressing the people, expressed here as “in his hand is the scale of cheating.” Historically, Israel economically and materially prospered, and this led to their pride. They were so self-sufficient and delusional that they would say, “We don’t need God.” They thought that because of their wealth, they were righteous and sinless. This attitude that was common both in the eighth century BC and first century AD is still common today—not only in the world but also in the Christian churches.

9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast. 10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

But their pride and self-delusion will be debunked. The Lord would humble them. Here the Lord evokes His attribute of immutability with “the LORD thy God from the land of

Egypt.” He recalls the history of the Exodus journey in the wilderness where they dwelt in tents. Instead of enjoying their houses, they would live in tents as their fathers did during their wilderness journey (13:4; Exodus 20:2). After the Assyrians were done with them, Israel would be grateful even for the booths they lived in for a week during the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33–43). Customarily, once a year the Israelites would spend a week living in tents during the Feast of Tabernacles to commemorate God’s protection as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Deuteronomy 1:19–2:1). In verse 10, the Lord warns that He has spoken through

the prophets and with different methods, all types of visions and parables to communicate to them (6:5; Amos 2:11; Ezekiel 3:14). Therefore, they cannot plead ignorance as a defense. Israel refused the admonitions but continued in their sin; therefore, the consequence of their sin will not be withheld.

11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

Verse 11 seems to confirm the degree and gravity of their sin of idolatry and abject rejection of the Lord. As an affirmation of their utter depravity, the prophet poses a rhetorical question: “Is there iniquity in Gilead?” He answers his question: “surely they are vanity.” Gilead was a region east of the Jordan known for its iniquity, vanity, idolatry, and wickedness. Gilgal, a major city just across the Jordan from Gilead in Canaan, is referred to as a place of false worship (4:15). Therefore, these places will be destroyed and their altars left as a heap of stones in the hollow of a plowed field.

12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. 13 And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.

With reference to Jacob’s plight, Hosea tells Israel to remember their humble beginnings: their prosperity was not by their personal effort, but because God was gracious to them. “Jacob fled into the country of Syria,” when he escaped from Esau to Padanaram (Genesis 28:2, 5). There he worked hard for His wealth. He served fourteen years (seven years for each of his two wives, Genesis 29:20–28), plus six more years to earn some of his father-in-law Laban’s sheep (Genesis 30:31; 31:41). Hosea also reminded them how the Lord delivered Israel by the hand of a prophet, Moses, out of Egypt and preserved them. As Jacob tended Laban’s flock, so the Lord cared for Israel in the wilderness, wandering. Unlike during Moses’ leadership when he led the children and were preserved, present Israel has no regard for the prophets (4:5, 6:5, 9:7).

14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him.

Despite warnings from the prophets, Israel was disobedient. They continued in their sin thereby aggravating the Lord’s “anger most bitterly.” Therefore the Lord will leave them with their guilt of bloodshed (1:4, 4:2, 5:2, 6:8). This also refers to violence they committed against others, including human sacrifices (3:2). The Lord gives up on them and will evoke justice. The clause “and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him” means the Lord will pay them with a taste of their own medicine. As in the Law of Moses, “their blood will be on their head” (Leviticus 20:11, 13, 16, 27). Here is a contrast between past divine preservation and present divine anger that would bring punishment (Isaiah 65:7). Although God is merciful and compassionate, He is also a just God, and every sin has its consequences and must be atoned. Graciously, God does not deal with us according to our sins. Thanks be to God for sending His Son to atone for us through grace.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Receiving a New Vision of God
(Genesis 28:10–17)

TUESDAY

Justice for Gentile Believers
(Acts 15:10–17)

WEDNESDAY

The Up or Down Choice
(Deuteronomy 28:1–6, 15–19)

THURSDAY

Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt
(Matthew 2:13–15)

FRIDAY

Ephraim Spurns God's Love and Suffers
(Hosea 11:3–6)

SATURDAY

Once a Slave; Now a Brother
(Philemon 8–21)

SUNDAY

Respond with Love and Justice Daily
(Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10, 12:1–2, 6–14)