

Plain Talk On Hosea

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A Prophet's Family Becomes A Symbol

Hosea 1:1-2:1

Our study of the book of Hosea focuses our attention upon the period in Israel's history when the judgment of God was about to fall upon the northern nation. We need to remember that Israel was chosen to be an example to the whole world of people who have believed in God, and may be counted as the people of God. They were to be blessed to witness to all the world the benefits of walking with God.

Such benefits however would not come on any people arbitrarily. To assume that God's people will be blessed simply because they are the people of God is to assume too much. It might be more accurate to say that the people of God have the privilege of being blessed according to their faith. It is always true, "according to your faith be it unto you." However, it is also true for them as it is for anyone else: "without faith it is impossible to please Him."

Faith, to really count, must be manifested in action. James tells about this in chapter 2:14-16; there you will find a thorough discussion of the fact that faith without works is dead. I could remind you also of that parable that all ten virgins could have claimed that they were believers, they were all expecting the Lord to come some time, but only five acted on their faith and filled their lamps to be ready. It remains one of the solemn tragedies of Scripture that the other five were never admitted to the abode of the blessed.

It is this truth that makes this study so serious and so solemn. All Israel in the time of Hosea gave mouth tribute to the Lord as their God. They all professed to belong to Him. Despite the ministry of the prophets, and the traditions of their past in the days of David, Moses and Abraham, the northern nation had shared in idol worship. "They forgot the Lord their God and served Baal and Ashtaroth." In more recent years they had tolerated and practiced Baal worship.

It was now God's will that the northern nation should fall before Assyria and be utterly destroyed. The southern nation, Judah, had not deteriorated as much; but sadly enough they had become infected, and their soul sickness was rapidly getting worse. The prospect was that Judah would also be visited in the judgment of God.

But with Judah there would be a difference. God would chastise Judah, but not utterly destroy them. God had promised Abraham that his seed should be as the stars in multitude. He had promised that He would raise up his Seed to become a blessing to all nations. A little later in history than Hosea, Jeremiah predicted that Judah would fall, that the people would be taken into captivity for seventy years. But then the nation would be restored.

At the time of Hosea matters were steadily growing worse. Hosea, in preaching to Judah, earnestly stressed that even though the waywardness of the people would increase until there was no remedy, and God would withdraw His presence and His favor so that utter collapse would occur; yet God would not leave them forever. He would come to them in the depths of their misery and call them back to Himself in

His grace, and for His everlasting blessing.

Hosea put his message in the frame of the relationship between a wife and her husband. Israel was in the role of the wife, and God was in the role of the husband. Hosea used his own domestic experience as a case in point to illustrate the meaning of his message.

We find at the very outset of the study of Hosea an ugly term. All the world knows only too well the dark reality indicated by the word "whore." Perhaps what makes this word so ugly, is because it means the spoiling of something so beautiful.

The relationship between God and His people in the culture of Israel has been referred to as something like the relationship between a bride and a bridegroom, illustrating love. During the time of the prophets it was common to refer to God as the husband of Israel.

At such times the thought would be that God would provide for Israel, as a man would protect and care for his wife. But Hosea makes use of this idea from another angle. The word "wife" implies faithful devotion with single-hearted affection. Israel was thought of as the wife who should find everything she wanted in her husband. It would be understood without question that as a wife would be loyal to her husband, so Israel should be loyal to the Lord God, in a world where many false gods as idols were known.

One phrase that is often included in the marriage vow is: "forsaking all others for thee alone." There seems to be something so right and good in that. This is the mood that is proper for the relationship that prevails between God and His people. Some have wondered at the Scripture that plainly states "The Lord thy God is a jealous God", but it graphically emphasizes the heart of the matter. That happens to be the truth. Thus the absolute necessity of sincere fervent devotion to God on the part of His people. The first great commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," or as the first of the Ten Words on Mount Sinai puts it "Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

It is possible that some may think this was pertinent only in the day when the false gods were called Baal and Ashtaroath. This would be to miss the whole point in this study. Whatever Baal and Ashtaroath meant then, and we do know that something of their appeal can be felt when it is remembered that Baal means power and strength, whereas Ashtaroath means pleasure and satisfaction, the fact was that worshipping them, serving them, was very popular in that day. Public acclaim and common esteem exalted the worship of these pagan gods until the Jews felt a strong inclination to join in that worship.

Today such interest and commitment can be seen in the love of money, and the love of pleasure. Paul wrote to Timothy that the time would come when men would be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." It may not be so easy to compare the personal experience of the worship of God with practices by which a man may accumulate money, or the personal participation in prayer meetings with the pleasure in sharing in the social whirl among worldly people, but this is where the truth lies to which our attention is being drawn in the books of the prophets.

The worship of Baal "on the high places" in Israel's history could be seen as similar to the gathering of crowds in our sports arenas, the conventions of bankers and merchants, etc., whereas the worship of Ashtaroath "in the groves" can be seen in the rock f festivals, the beauty pageants, and the theaters of our time.

When the prophets spoke of God as being the husband of Israel they meant that Israel should worship God only. The prophecy of Hosea is famous as being the outstanding instance in which the personal domestic experience of a prophet was to be used as the illustration of his message.

The story of Hosea's domestic life is short and simple. Apparently Hosea was a godly man from the

very first. He seems to have made the matter of getting married a matter of prayer. When we read, "And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms" we should not suppose that this was a case of Hosea hearing a voice in the night putting the idea into his mind. With conditions in Judah being as loose morally as they were, it is quite possible that this sensitive young man committed to serve God, might well have raised the question in prayer: "Should I run the risk of marrying one of these girls?"

Calling his wife Gomer "a wife of whoredoms" need not mean that this young girl had been immoral. It seems more likely that she was so designated because she grew up in this environment. Immorality was like an epidemic. She would be affected and perhaps infected by the prevailing culture, to have inclinations and proclivities that later became actual.

Just so the fact that the future children were called "children of whoredoms", does not imply that they were born of illicit relations; but rather that they would be born into this sinful society, and would doubtless reflect their own responses to their environment.

One is reminded of the experience of Jeremiah. When Jeremiah was a young man, he had been called to serve the Lord from the time he was just a child. He wanted to evade it, saying he was too young. There was no doubt he was a man that was sensitive to God. We read that God told Jeremiah not to get married, because he was not to be responsible for bringing children into the world into which he was living.

My interest in making these comments is only to bring out what followed was not so much the result one could expect because of Gomer's personal waywardness, as if she had been in herself a wayward person even before Hosea married her; but rather that it was the result which followed from living in Judah as the people lived at that time.

Gomer bore Hosea three children. Each was named in a way that conveyed to the world the message that Hosea prophesied. You should think of Hosea as being a man that had in his bones a message to preach. I expect this would be the kind of thing Hosea would say. The first child, a son, was named Jezreel, by way of drawing attention to the prospect that it was the will of God that He "will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel." Plainly put, the northern kingdom would be destroyed, and he called his first child by that name. Jezreel drew attention to a city in the northern kingdom where disobedience to God had taken place. The second child, a daughter, was named Loruhamah which means "No Mercy." This showed that God would show no mercy to the northern nation; but He would show mercy to the southern nation. The third child, a son, was named Lo-Ammi which means "Not my people." In this way the word was sent forth that this generation would not be the people of God. As Hosea writes it: "for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." Thus by choosing the names of these three children Hosea brought his message to the attention of his generation. Any time the people would hear their names or see those children, they would be aware that the oldest one indicating by his very name that the northern nation would be destroyed; the second one indicating by her name there will be no mercy from God; and the third one indicating by his name "They will not be my people, I will not be their God."

Hosea knew more than these three items in the will of God, and in his book this is expressed. He could foresee that when this predicted history had run its course: when the northern nation had been destroyed, without mercy from God; and this generation would have departed from God so that they too should be rejected; God would yet fulfill His promise to Abraham. As we read in Hosea, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." And that expression brings us directly into New Testament language.

I want to remind you that this seems to be the prophetic insight of Hosea by which he foresaw the

coming of Christ, who would bring the Gentiles to God. Paul says "Those people of whom God said you are not my people, would now be called the people of God." John afterwards told us "As many as received Him to them was given the power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name." With the coming of the Gospel in Christ the names would be changed to Ammi which means My People and Ruhamah which means Mercy. Thus we will find ourselves in the study of Hosea brought into an insight into the significance of the relationship of God's people to Him.

God looks on the heart. He wants us to be faithful. He wants us to commit ourselves to Him. We may not consider ourselves important; but what matters is; do I turn to God? do I trust in Him? It is futile for me to think that because we have no items around called Baal and Ashtaroth, that those idols are not available and that they are not all around me. I am just to have in mind that when I want things, when I seek more than other people have, when I would like to possess things and be covetous about things, I am actually worshipping at the shrine of Baal. Almighty God isn't satisfied with that. He wants me to want Him, not money, not prestige, not power, not my way in the world, not my ideas, but God. You and I will know the natural man could not very well turn himself over. It is like getting himself free from his own shadow. But we are glad to remember a person can be born again. He can be changed. He can actually have in him the new life that is in Christ Jesus; and as surely as Christ is in him, he will be inwardly disposed to seek the face of God. He will want the blessing of God and desire above all else that he might be well pleasing in His sight. This will be the effect of the Holy Spirit working in his heart.

It would be well to remember that when I am surrounded by so many things that are pleasing to me, so many things that promise far more pleasure than they can produce, that those things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination to the Lord.

The message of Hosea is to warn believers that if that is the widespread general attitude of the public, and if it is the character of the culture in which they are living, they should be reminded of the danger they are in. There is danger that the heart could conceivably be turned away from God to seek after the things that would please the person. However, Almighty God looks upon believers with mercy as He did in the days of Hosea. Through Hosea we discover that Almighty God has loved us with an everlasting love for which we can be ever grateful.

The Pursuit Of Love

Hosea 2:2-23

This study will focus our attention upon the love of God. To understand this matter we will need to examine the word "love." "Love" as used in the Bible means something else and different than the popular usage of this word, as the public uses the word "love" generally. In some circles "love" is used to indicate "desire" or even "lust." With good people love would mean strong desire and with evil persons it can mean lust. Both of these usages refer directly to some aspect of feeling or even of passion. And actually both are definitely selfish, because this is a matter of thinking "What do I want? What am I yearning for? Whom am I lusting after? What would give me pleasure? What would please my physical interest or my hunger or my appetite?" So a person can say "I just love custard" and in the same vein "I just hate black olives." Always talking about self. But when examined closely all this will be seen to be self-centered.

What do I want? What would I like? What would I like to have?

Now actually there is a legitimate word that can be used here. I could say "I like custard" or "I do not like black olives." When I use the verb "like" I might remember this is one word that started out as a preposition. "John is like Jim" becomes "John likes Jim" – in other words John and Jim realize they are "alike." "Birds of a feather, flock together" is the prevailing dynamic in this case. The fact is: I "like" what is "like" me.

"Like" is based upon personal "feeling", upon personal "judgment" which is reflected when you hear me say "I like this, I do not like that." But all this is not the nature of "love." No doubt it is common to use the word "love" when the meaning is to "like very much" as one can say in answer to a question "Do you like this hat?" And a person might answer "Oh yes! You know I just love a broad brim." But this is an acquired use of the word – and it is not the Scriptural sense.

When you say "God so loved the world" this does not specifically refer to His "feelings." Actually His feelings about the world can be expressed very simply: "God is angry with the wicked every day." That is Scripture. A good example of words such as I am speaking of "like" and "love" can be noted if one considers the attitude of the parents toward an infant, toward a baby. There need be no question that they really love that baby, that is true. But if that baby should develop a habit of waking them up at 2:30 every morning for some food, they could know also what it means to say honestly that they do not "like" him.

The basic meaning of "love" as it is used in the Scripture can be seen in that wonderful verse "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son", especially when one connects the words "so" with the following "that." He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Paul wrote "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 6:8). And then again John wrote "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10).

It would seem then that a very definite element in "loving" is "giving." Nowhere is the difference from the popular usage any more clearly seen. So often the idea when you use the word "love" is that of "longing to have" or "longing to get." But the Scriptural meaning is "longing to give, longing to bestow upon." When I realize God loves me it is not that I think He wants me for Himself to make Him rich, but that He wants to bless me, to give to me, to make me rich.

When God loved His people He gave to them all they needed to make them rich and prosperous. He could have expected from them appreciation and thanks. But the sad truth was that Israel was attracted to the pagan practices of worshipping the forces of nature and the pleasures of personal satisfaction. Such esteem, such adoration and such worship were expressed by the pagans in rites and ceremonies which they practiced at the shrines which exalted Baal on the high places, and which served Ashtaroth in the groves. Judah seemed oblivious to the impression this would make on God. They did not seem to realize it. Thus it fell to the ministry of the prophets to show the people, to show the Jews, their sin, and to warn them of the coming judgment that would be sure if they continued in their sinful way.

Our portion of study for today is the second chapter of Hosea and this chapter actually contains two messages. First there is the revelation of what God will do to Judah in judgment because of their turning away from Him, from worshipping Him to serving idols. Believe me, God will not let that go unnoticed. That is going to be dealt with. This is a heavy message of dire warnings found in Hosea, chapter 2, verses 1 through 13.

Then there is set forth a joyous prediction of glorious actions by a reconciled God who will bless His people. The latter portion of the chapter describes the blessedness of those people "whose God is the Lord." The chapter does not tell us of what happened to propitiate an offended God. We are not given any

explanation of why it is one way in the first part and another way in the second part, but everything the Bible tells us about God is to the point that He is faithful and constant. His judgment is certain and sure. For those who know the Gospel it is easy to see that the coming of the Messiah, of Christ, would make this change in God's attitude possible. So it can be helpful if you just think that in the first part of the chapter you can read what the situation is with Judah as they are when Hosea is living among them. And in the second part of the chapter you can see what Hosea is predicting is going to happen to them when Messiah has come and has brought them into favor with God.

In Hosea chapter 2 verses 2-13 there is a record of God's complaint about His people, the Jews. And so we read "Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband." In these stern words the principle is revealed that God goes by things "as they are", not by what people say about them, or what is commonly said about them. Outwardly Judah was said to be committed to follow God, and people in the world might say that they were God's people. But actually they were not doing that. They were not following God. They were following Baal. And this is how God sees them and that is why He says "They do not belong to me." "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband." Now he is referring to the people that are the descendants of Abraham and the descendants of Isaac and of Israel. Hosea is referring to the very people living in the land that was the land of God and normally speaking the public could all say Israel, both north and south, belongs to God. But Almighty God doesn't say that. God looks down on them and sees how wayward their hearts are and this is what He says "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband."

So God through the prophet urges His people to put away pagan practices, warning them that He will chastise them severely by stripping them of every practical benefit that they have. Listen to the words: "Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst." This is a picture of the utter helplessness and desolation to which Israel would be reduced.

This warning sounds strange to ears that have been accustomed to hearing the sweet promises of the Gospel of God. It is so common to think that every act of God will be gentle and gracious. It is almost shocking to be warned that God will deal thus with people to whom He has been gracious. The truth is that disobedient conduct can nullify, can wipe out, a blessed relationship. It is not easy to accept the word that says "Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:28-30). Sometimes I think that it is almost a surprise to people to think that those words were spoken by Jesus of Nazareth. They were spoken when He was warning His people. Don't think for one moment that a person can play it fast and loose with God. God is gracious, God is merciful, God is kind; but God is no fool.

Not only will the disobedient people suffer loss in the judgment of God, but their children will share in that judgment. We are all so glad to think that the Lord will gladly receive little children saying "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," but the harsh truth is that the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children to the third and fourth generations. Hosea reports the word of the Lord: "I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms" (Hosea 2:4). It is good to remember that Ezekiel reveals that each soul will stand before God in his or her own actions. (Ezekiel 33:11-16). But the word of Hosea here indicates that there will be consequences in a man's household according to his actions. Such consequences may not shut a soul away from God's grace, but there may well be sad results of willful and worldly living on the part of parents, in the lives of their children.

Hosea reveals that Judah had done shamefully in that they had given natural forces the credit for the blessing that they had received. By giving credit to nature instead of recognizing God as the giver of every good and perfect gift, Judah had incurred the wrath and the judgment of God.

God does not stand idly by when those whom He has blessed give credit and praise to any other source than Himself. Not only will they receive no further blessing but God will take measures to see that they are thwarted in reaching out for what they feel they need. "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths" (Hosea 2:6).

When Judah finally realizes that seeking what she needs from nature is not successful, she will remember how she was once blessed by the goodness of God; and will then think to turn to God for a renewal of those benefits. "And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (Hosea 2:7). As a matter of fact, this was just what Judah had overlooked. Judah had overlooked the fact of how good it was when she was with God. She had not realized that all she had was by the goodness of God, so that she had actually turned over all her possessions, which she had received from God, into the service of Baal. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal" (Hosea 2:8).

I cannot help but think how this brings to our minds persons who have grown up in godly homes. They have had believing parents and they have been blessed, blessed with fine dispositions, blessed with good characters, blessed with good minds; and then they use that character, they use those minds, they use that personality to get along selfishly in the world and to advance themselves before other people, never thinking to thank God for the blessings they received in that godly home. Taking everything as if it belonged to them and turning around and sharing it with everything else that is in the world.

But God's judgment will be thorough and relentless. Here is the way you read it. "Therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand" (Hosea 2:9-10). Hosea goes on to detail how utterly God in judgment will destroy all that Israel has cherished as her good fortune. Let me read the latter part of this as Hosea puts it in Hosea, chapter 2, verse 11: "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord" (Hosea 2:11-13). That's the way it is put.

After reading through the first 13 verses of this 2nd chapter of Hosea, and feeling the heavy judgment of God upon this unfaithful people it comes almost as a shocking surprise to read the promise of blessing in the remainder of the chapter. Hosea does not supply any sort of bridge or basis for the transition from judgment to grace. But elsewhere in the prophets of the Old Testament the prediction is set forth that God will send His Chosen One, His Messiah, who will save the remnant of Israel who are obedient to God, and who will be the desire of all nations, the hope of the Gentiles.

When Messiah has accomplished His work of salvation and has reconciled repentant sinners to God, so that they are regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God will deal with these who are now His children in grace and mercy. Hosea presents the Word of God as though he were simply reporting verbatim what God says He will do.

In verses 14-15 the promise is that God will speak "comfortably" to Israel, and will endow her with

such riches that she will sing "as in the days of her youth." In that day the communion of devotion will be restored. And so I read: "And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi (my Man – my Husband), and shalt call me no more Baali (my god)" These two strange words are very significant. The word "Ishi" means my husband, my man. And the word "Baali" means my god, speaking of the gods that might be found everywhere, many gods. Apparently the Jews had referred to God with the same terms that were used for idols, but in that day of blessing the Jews would know that God was unique. He was not one of the gods of many gods. He was the only God in all the universe. And God would bring it to pass that His people would no longer use the name of Baal when they were referring to God. And they would actually say about the Lord "My Husband."

In verse 18 the promise is spelled out that all the destructive elements in the world will be brought under control so that God's people can live in safety, without being threatened in conflict. Nothing that hurts or destroys will be allowed to enter His Kingdom.

In verses 19 and 20 God promises that He will betroth His people to Himself "in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness."

The chapter is concluded with a wonderful description of the blessedness which God will provide for those who belong to Him. In all of this the prophet was promising wonderful blessing to those who put their trust in God, and who walked before Him in faith.

The Depths Of Love

Hosea 3:1-5

We are continuing in our study in the book of Hosea and now we come to the bright spot in Hosea's message. The third chapter of Hosea is the shortest chapter in the book, and yet it is the most eloquent! How we wish everyone studying this material could know from personal experience what is revealed here! Let me read this passage to you.

"Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adultress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love lagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for a homer of barley, and a half homer of barley: and I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so I will also be for thee. For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days" (Hosea 3:1-5).

A very simple story! But very profound!!

Hosea was commanded to love this woman – despite her history, despite her conduct "according to the love of God toward the children of Israel." Immediately we can feel in our bones that would be impossible!! If we use the word "love" with emphasis upon "feelings", the "impossible" aspect can be understood. This woman had forsaken her husband, and had given herself to other men. It would be more than human nature could do to feel delight in someone who had been so unfaithful.

This will account for the serious doubt in the minds of many devout Bible students that the book of Hosea could be true as it is written. Such persons feel that a godly man like Hosea could not possibly have taken a woman who had become a harlot and spent years on the streets as a loose living woman and take that woman into his home to be his wife. But this is the very point of this whole Scripture! To be sure this would demand more grace on the part of Hosea than could be expected from any man, but this was exactly what was needed to illustrate the grace of God.

The language used implies that the demonstration of the grace of God was in mind when this Word of God came to Hosea. He was to take this woman "yet an adulteress" but he was to take her "according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel." He was to act toward her as God would act toward Israel. It is almost startling to think that God appraises conduct in which I seek the things of the world, to be of the same quality as the conduct of a wife who seeks a stranger rather than her husband.

It is very important in getting to know God that we do not fill in with such ideas as we might want to add to what is revealed in Scripture. Let the Bible stand as it is. It may startle us, it may even shock us, but let it stand as it is because it is going to reveal something about God that we would never imagine. Sometimes I think people would draw away from the idea that God is a jealous God, as if that implied some defect or blemish in Him. But if I were to do that I would make a mistake. When the Scripture reveals in the book of Exodus "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5-6), this whole truth is clearly set forth. There is another Scripture that reads "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exodus 34:14). And this is exactly the trait in God's own being and character and person, which the Jews had aroused by worshipping the gods in the land.

There was no doubt that Israel had worshipped Baal and served Ashtaroth. They probably had not started out to do this altogether as the heathen did, but in time they had adopted the heathen ideas and brought those ideas into their own hearts, mingling pagan practices with the bit of revealed truth which each one might have from God. There was no doubt for example that Gomer, the wife, had been unfaithful to Hosea, even though there is no account of the stages that she passed through.

Apparently Hosea did not seek Gomer until she was forsaken on the streets. This is another very striking aspect. It is as though Hosea waited until she would be ready to come back and she would not be ready to come back until she found herself utterly forsaken. When she was alone, forsaken, offering her worn out faded body for hire at an harlot's wage, Hosea came and hired her, paying for her to come home to him. He did not approach her on the basis of her being his wife. Because actually having become a harlot she had nullified the matter of being his wife. She wasn't his wife any longer. He approached her as she was and contracted for her time and attention as if he had been a stranger. Even so would God one day do with Judah. I know this is not nice to think about and yet if you will look at it, you can see something in it that is amazing and it is wonderful. I do want to say it is glorious! God will one day come and seek His own who have been wayward and have turned away from Him, but He will come and seek them. Even so would God do with Judah. When Judah had been defeated and taken captive, as they were by Babylon, God would watch over them, keep them for Himself and one day restore them permanently in the place of blessing.

The reference in verses 3-4 seems obscure for the lack of any clear record of such a time of "probation" in the history of Judah or in the life of Gomer. In those Scriptures we read:

"And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee. For the children of Israel shall

abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image and without an ephod, and without teraphim" (Hosea 3:3-4).

But the period of the captivity in Babylon which occurred after the lifetime of Hosea could very well be described by that passage. This is just what their living was like while they were captives in Babylon. They no longer had a temple, they no longer had a king, they no longer had the sacrifices, they no longer came before the altar, they were without the help of any priests, this would be very much as it was then. And this could imply a condition similar to being in the grave, for you know not anything, as Jesus of Nazareth was between His death and His resurrection. You will remember that when He died on Calvary's Cross, He was put in the grave where He was for three days. Certainly it does seem to indicate a phase of almost oblivion when there would be no positive action, but this would be followed by a time of glory.

Judah would not do anything in this time to usher in a new age. Judah was as if she were dead. Judah apparently would be helpless, even lifeless: God would do for her. God would recover her to Himself. Gomer could do nothing in this time to expedite matters. That poor woman was on the street, an abandoned harlot. Hosea would now act to bring her to himself. Once set free she could come and seek his face. Hosea has given us here a general sketch of how things would come to pass affecting Judah. During the time Hosea lived there, Judah was being unfaithful to God. By adopting the worship of idols and by serving Baal, Judah was acting like an unfaithful wife. Judah would incur all the judgment of God, and would suffer rejection, and the loss of much that she had received from God; but for which she had never been thankful. She lost all those things. Then Judah would be conquered and taken into bondage. There would be no glory, no joy even though she would not be destroyed as she was when she was in the captivity. She was there but she didn't have anything, like a slave.

But the Lord would not keep His anger forever. The day would come when the Jews would be released from captivity. Being set free they would turn back to go to Judah and to rebuild Jerusalem, and then they could again openly serve the Lord. It seems rather pathetic that it should be so often true that first we need to be deprived of some blessing before we really appreciate it. We used to say out in the country when I was just a boy, many is the time that I have heard it, "You never appreciate the water until the well goes dry." Sometimes I wonder if this principle is not operative today. Is it not possible that our generation will so neglect the Bible, that God in His judgment will shut us away from that source of blessing for awhile, so that when we find it again we may surely appreciate it? Could this be what is happening in so many Sunday Schools and so many congregations where the Bible is being criticized and devalued? You know there are many many places, even called by the name of Christian church, where the Bible is a shut book. And if you do open it, about all the time is taken up to tell you that it doesn't mean what it says, and you don't need to believe it as it is. Hosea's wife did not appreciate what she had in Hosea as a husband, but now that she has lived for a time alone with strangers, the blessedness of being in her own home with her own husband would be very wonderful.

In all the days when Judah was a nation with the house of David on the throne so many privileges were taken for granted without real appreciation. In the city of Jerusalem stood the temple in all its golden glory that Solomon had built into it. Services of temple worship were the order of the day. The Levites were in charge to conduct the services and everything was done time after time, again and again, in the usual way. And so it happened these people were just human beings, it happened that the whole practice became a matter of routine. God knows. If I come into His House and I do not bow down my heart before God, God knows. He sees the heart.

Isaiah lived at the same time as Hosea. You know that was a period in Israel's history when they had several great prophets. Isaiah was perhaps the greatest. Hosea, Amos, and Micah all preached at the same

time. Isaiah gives us some, insight into the religious life of the Jews. I want to turn in the book of Isaiah to read a passage where Isaiah records, tells, the mind of God. I am reading in chapter 1 beginning at verse 11. And here are the words:

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: (and we are to understand that to mean, what difference do you think it makes to me that you are holding these church services and singing these hymns and going through these exercises?) I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. (That is exactly what He told them to bring, exactly what He told them to do, but He is saying here that the way they have done it makes Him sick of the whole business). When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? (Whoever asked you to come to worship me?) Bring no more vain ablations; incense is an abomination unto me; (and incense always refers to things of prayer); the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting (even your prayer meeting). Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: (when you go to pray, I won't even look) yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:11-15).

This is the way Isaiah put it. It is a stern, sobering, really heart-shaking indictment. This passage reveals how God feels about insincere, formal worship. The prophets preached in this way to bring the people to repentance, even as John the Baptist preached in the days of Jesus of Nazareth. What happened to Judah is a warning, even to us in our time. It does matter to God as to what frame of mind I have when I come to worship service in the church. If I come as a matter of routine, as a matter of habit, and by any chance I think that my presence in the church is enough, I am in for a rude awakening. God knows what is in the heart of man and God looks on the heart. And God is not mocked! Judah was to learn in the hard way "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

But the gifts and the calling of God are sure. God had promised Abraham that his seed should inherit the land, and that they should have the blessing of God. Judgment had gone out from God upon these people who said they believed in God, and claimed to be the heirs of His promise, but who actually did not really believe in Him. They were deceived into thinking that the pagan gods of the Canaanites were really the source of power. Today this would be a case of a person professing to believe in the living God, but actually having in mind that the natural processes would bring whatever benefits there might be. But even as God judged the nation to be unworthy of blessing, there was always a remnant: some of the Jews would really believe. The prophets predicted that God would fulfill His promise to Abraham by blessing this remnant, and making them the heirs of the promise.

In His own time God would send His Chosen One, the Messiah, who was to come into the world to seek and to save the lost. The remnant would believe in Him and come at His call. "In His name shall the Gentiles trust". A great multitude would come into the Kingdom of God to worship and to serve Him.

It would be true of these as Hosea wrote: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." "Seeking the Lord" would mean they would come to worship and "David their king" would mean they had come to serve. So this is this truth that we have been looking at here today. God would, in spite of all that they had done, in spite of His judgment, in spite of the fact that they earned His displeasure, in spite of the fact He had shown His displeasure, God would yet call to Him those who would believe in Him and would yet bless them and bring them to Himself.

The Knowledge Of God

Hosea 4:1-6:6

In our study today we shall see first an exposition of the sin of God's people in the time of Hosea and then a sketch of the situation in which the grace of God will be revealed in the course of time. Let me read to you in Hosea in chapter 4 beginning at verse 1. Hear these words: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother." That is the way it reads and we are impressed to say "Sin is a reproach to any people." In Israel sin was so widespread and in all aspects of their relationships to God and to man, and as I read it to you, what a catalogue! "No truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land" but rather "swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery." Such conduct offends God. You don't have to be a Christian, you don't have to be a person professing faith in God for this to offend Him. Anybody, any human being on earth whom God created in His own image, any person doing like this, God will not be satisfied with this. And so we can read "the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land."

Doubtless for such crude conduct the judgment of God can be expected, but I wonder if we are able to see that this is how God feels when persons, human beings, esteem "science" better than the "Bible". Do we realize that this is how God feels if we esteem a picnic a more significant project than a prayer meeting or when we call into consultation a Jewish rabbi rather than to bring in a praying minister from some Pentecostal church?

Because of such widespread sin there will be widespread desolation; "everyone that dwelleth therein shall languish." There will be no remedy from any human source. Destruction will be total and inevitable. Each person will fall even when he can see, and the preacher will fall with his people in any time of uncertainty or confusion. Even the traditions that people gained in their homes will be destroyed so that they can no longer cherish them.

I want to read on now in verse 6, Hosea chapter 4, verse 6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame." Ignorance of God causes the spreading of sin. The people "rejected knowledge" with the result that God rejected them. Where would the knowledge of God be found? Even today in the Scriptures, in the Bible. The Bible reveals the truth of God. When people will not read the Bible, they are actually turning away from what the Bible teaches: viz., the knowledge of God!! Praying enables the Scriptures to take root in the heart which will bear fruit in faith and knowledge. If one does not pray the Scripture as read in the Bible does not stick in the mind – and so there is no fruit in knowledge. Fellowship and communion with other believers fosters the growth of faith and increaseth knowledge. "It is not good for man to be alone." This is true not only socially but spiritually. We read: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." And so it happens even like this amongst us today.

There are people who do not want to read and study the Bible. They do not want to join in praying. They do not even want to associate with those who read the Bible and pray. The result is that such people remain ignorant of God. The New Testament speaks of such as are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them."

Hosea wrote of such persons in his time. He reveals the Word of God saying "I will also reject thee . . . I will also forget thy children." The Word of God goes on to say "As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame" (Hosea 4:7).

Apparently these ungodly persons were quite satisfied to turn away from God. "They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity" (Hosea 4:8). Both people and priest agreed in their procedures. And because of this God says "I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their doings."

And then follows an illuminating description of the judgment of God. The people will find that they have no satisfaction in anything they do. This is rather striking. When one thinks about the judgment of God, I don't know how it is with other people, but for myself I could understand that in a crude sort of way if I got hit in the head with a brick, I could think to myself, "Well I had the judgment of God." No, that isn't probably the way it is going to be. It is not always easy to understand that if I am involved in something and have no satisfaction in it, I work and I don't feel anything good about it, the judgment of God is upon me. Because normally speaking I could joy in the results of my work. Normally speaking what I would do would come out to something. But when I work and work and nothing happens, then I am actually being set aside, as it were, and missing the blessing of God. We read: "For they shall eat, and not have enough." Their hunger will never be satisfied. This is one of the aspects of the judgment of God. "They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase." Even though they do what the pagans do, they shall not prosper. What they do will not do them any good. That is also a striking thing. When people who belong to God, confess the name of Christ, and are members of the church, when they mingle with the world and the world is going about its worldly way to have its own satisfactions and its own worldly activities, these Christian people, these Christian professing people, may do those same things; but they won't get any satisfaction out of it – not even the same kind of satisfaction the world gets. Getting no satisfaction out of what one is doing and no benefit about what one is doing indicates that one is under the judgment of God. When God blesses a person he will prosper, but when God does not bless all the effort and the action amounts to nothing.

"Whoredom and wine and now wine take away the heart" (Hosea 4:11). This is a strong passage and it is a challenging truth. Because it has an ugly word "whoredom" in it, we are inclined to just turn away from it. But wait a minute! What does that mean? Judah, the people of God, was going simply after the pagan ideas: worldliness, one could say, and excitement – that is what wine and new wine is. Worldliness and excitement and new thrills have a way of taking away the love of God and spiritual realities. Peter advises the believers "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (I Peter 2:11). There is always a double hazard in applying such Scripture to one's own living: in the first place what is being warned against in Scripture seems such a far cry from our own way of living we get the impression that it doesn't really mean us. At this distance I can get the impression that the Bible language is so blunt, the actual practices must have been vulgar and vile and that is why it is so blunt. But this is actually a mistake on my part. The truth is that these practices would really in that time be quite acceptable and quite definitely appealing. The second aspect here where I can make a mistake is that I may be tempted to adopt as my own procedure things that would never seem ugly or forbidding to me. The notion that Satan would be grim, forbidding, ugly or even dangerous looking is

quite beside the fact. Paul writes by way of warning and I am talking along in this fashion and we could almost miss it. I want to pause as I come to this point and I want to go slowly when I am showing you, pointing out to you, that the devil doesn't look ugly. The devil doesn't look fearsome. Listen to what Paul says: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

Hosea points out how far the people have gone astray by noting that in their need and their perplexity they had turned to the pagan sources of guidance for aid. Of course they had found nothing to help. In our time this would be turning to some device for occult guidance instead of turning to God in prayer. This turning to idolatrous practices was so common that it became a way of life for Israel. Many would not know any better and many would follow such practices with no sense of their real significance.

Hosea preached that God would not hold individuals responsible for such error, since all the people were so mixed together that the Jewish girls and women would not even feel that they were doing wrong when they were indulging in pagan practices. But the nation as a whole would be judged for allowing such error to go unchallenged.

Israel was apparently given up as lost in Hosea's time, but Judah was warned not to follow that example, not to join them in their polluted religious practices. "For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer" (Hosea 4:16). This seems to refer to an unwilling beast which is not willing to be led but actually being dragged forward while its legs are stiffly propped in resistance so that the heifer is actually being slid forward while exerting all its strength to hold back. That is the graphic illustration that the prophet uses of the spiritual attitude of the people. God wanted to bring them His way: they did not want to come.

In any case the next verse indicates that the northern nation that is here called Ephraim is totally addicted to idol worship. The advice to Judah is "Let him alone." The next two verses give further evidence of the total deterioration of Israel, and Judah is warned to extricate herself from any further involvement.

Hosea then presents another summary of the situation. So far as the northern nation is concerned Hosea speaks to the priests and to the king. The blame for this whole catastrophe belongs to them. They were in a position of opportunity because the leadership was in their hands, but they had actually taken advantage of their opportunity to promote their own ideas. They had been a "snare" to the people, whom they enmeshed in their own net, and whom they had made captive. The rebels against God were rampant, always ignoring any rebuke that God might send.

God knows Ephraim very well. He knows that the northern nation has given themselves over to idol worship. He knows they will not turn to God, but they are moved from within by the disposition to turn to pagan idols. They have never recognized the Lord as God. As a matter of fact it is their pride that is responsible and as a result Ephraim will fall "in their iniquity." The sad truth is that Judah will also fall in the judgment of God. Even when they come with their flocks and herds to approach God with their sacrifices, they will not find God. He looks on the heart, "To obey is better than sacrifice." You know what I am saying? I am saying that if I don't in my heart want to serve God, if deep down in my heart I am selfish and self-indulgent and I want to do as I please, if that is what I am like, coming to church and putting a \$5 bill in the collection plate will not help me any. I might be impressive to people but not to God. God looks on the heart. Now these people, in the times of their distress – because they were not having any pleasure, as you know they were not being successful, they tried to come to God. They brought their flocks and herds to sacrifice coming to God, but they could not find Him. He looks on the heart. "To

obey is better than sacrifice." It is a common snare to think that I can do as I please and then by attending church and putting something in the offering I can make everything all right. This is a delusion. "He hath withdrawn himself from them."

Israel has been unfaithful to God. Now they shall be destroyed with all that they possess. Ephraim is doomed in the day of judgment. It is common knowledge throughout Israel that God will destroy. The sad fact is that the leaders of Judah cast off all restraint in going with Israel, and so they will suffer a similar destruction. The truth is that the northern nation willingly transgressed the guidance of God, and so they will be utterly removed from their place of privilege.

There is a tragic note in the fact that Israel tried to get help from Assyria to avert their destruction, but this was not successful and the prophet says "he could not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." Ephraim's fate is to be torn apart, to be totally devastated. And Judah also will suffer this fate.

And then suddenly the prophet changes to another key. Just like being transposed in music. In chapter 5, verses 15 through chapter 6 verse 6 is set forth the promise of the Gospel. Judah did not earn this, nor deserve it. There is here a clear sketch of what will happen by the grace of God. In chapter 5 verse 15 we have the mind of God setting out in so many words what God will do. He will withdraw, take away His blessing, until His people repent, "and seek my face." "In their affliction they will seek me early." He will let them have trouble until they turn to Him.

And then in the next few verses there is sketched in the words of His repentant people and the prophet is wording it the way Israel will talk when they repent in the course of their deliberate actions. They will call upon themselves to come to God. Let me read that portion to you. It is in chapter 6, verses 1-3: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." This is the confidence that these people have. They will call upon themselves to come to God, recognizing that it is God that has chastised them, but confident that God will receive them. "A broken and a contrite heart the Lord will not despise."

There is confidence in the resurrection: "in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (Hosea 6:2). And there is confidence in the continued blessing from God. As surely as they really turn to God and "follow on to know the Lord", they will get to know Him, "whom to know aright is life eternal."

And then there is a comment from God Himself as He sees His people. Israel was actually the people of God. He called them and blessed them; they had responded with a certain degree of virtue and then He says "But your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

Because of this temporary nature of their goodness God sent His Word to them by the prophets. He sent the prophets to cut off their irregular actions. So He says "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets." Also He sent His Word to bring them to self-denial. The way of the Lord includes mercy from Him rather than sacrifice from the people. God wants recognition of Himself and His works rather than any spiritual commitment from the people. That is rather an amazing thing. If I come into the presence of God, it is not primarily I am coming in there to tell Him what I am going to do. I am not primarily coming in there to bow myself down and tell Him "Now Lord I am going to serve you." But what God wants me to do is to look, open my eyes, open my heart, do what God has done. Look on God. There is life for a look at the crucified One. There is life at this moment for thee.

This description of what God wants from His people is exactly what the New Testament reveals that

God provides for us in Christ Jesus.

Judgement Upon God's People

Hosea 6:7-10:15

God is righteous. Because of this He will reveal the truth about His people. The prophets were sent to warn and to instruct His people in the ways of God. Because a person believes in God does not mean that such a person will obey God. But obedience to God is what He looks for!

However the believer can be instructed and warned. Even if he is being disobedient he can be told. In His faithfulness God graciously sent His prophets to show His people the error of their ways. There was always the chance that some would repent and turn to Him. The prophets told them that God knew of their unfaithfulness to Him, and warned them that God would visit judgment upon them. It may come as a surprise, but the truth is clear in the Bible that judgment must begin at the house of God.

We are indebted to the prophets for making this point very clear. Souls that have begun to serve the Lord and have openly committed themselves to walking with God, are in danger of becoming unfaithful to God, as long as they are in this world. This world will surround them with temptations and with various suggestions as to what might be done, which may be something else than what God wants done.

Israel had the great privilege of being a nation that was called of God to be His in a special way. Through them and their affairs God would reveal to the whole world how God deals with His own. He dealt with them in a special way. In His providence He blessed them. In His grace He called them to repent and promised them His mercy. Because they were so blessed they were so responsible: "To whom much is given, much Will be required."

But God will also reveal how He will judge their sins. He is merciful and gracious; but "God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The messages of the prophets reveal that God is slow to anger and quick to show mercy; but they also faithfully reveal that when God's people persist in sinning, despite every warning, the time can and will come when God will take action in judgment and will cut off those who have shown they are incorrigible. It is such an easy thing to assume that if we have been blessed, we will always be blessed. That if we have had the favor of God, we will always have the favor of God. But this is a false assumption.

While God does in grace do many things we do not deserve and gives us many things which are beyond our desserts, it is basically true and needs to be remembered that nobody can make a fool of God. A person can actually wear out His patience, great as it is; and when that is done there is no relief from the judgment that is sure to come. At the same time it would seem that God wants men to have such information about Himself and His plan that would build their confidence in Him, and lay a foundation for their believing the Gospel and responding to His call. Thus it belongs to the grace of God that He reveals His reason for acting in judgment.

Now God could have acted in judgment just on the basis of what is right and wrong, He could have brought His judgment to pass and have been done with it. But He didn't do it that way. He explained His course of action. He showed why He judged as He did. He showed the way in which these people had been doing was the reason why He would act as He did. It belonged to the grace of God that he revealed

His reason for acting in judgment. God's action may have seemed to be sudden but it actually never was. In the wisdom of God man as created was given a certain freedom in his capacity to choose. The human situation always presents some alternative possibilities in which a man may choose as he will. Doubtless there will always be certain practical limitations which place limits upon the extent of man's action in any given alternative, but man will always have an option in which he must make his choice.

From the very first it would seem that the created world included the presence and the activities of Satan. The origin of Satan remains obscure. The Bible does not tell us very clearly, not so plainly, as to how Satan came to be. It seems to be indicated in the Scriptures that Satan is a created being, dependent upon God for his energy, and contained by God in his activities. I mean he is kept by God within the limits of the will of God. At the same time it is obvious that the scope of Satan's activities include man as he was created. Satan is malicious. It is written about him that he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. This is an element of truth that it seems to me every believer should be quietly and seriously thoughtful about. There is in the world actually active an element that would mislead, that would deceive, that would lead into trouble. Satan goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. I know that a great many people, when they think of the devil also think of hell; because many people would assume that the devil is in hell. And all I want to say now, and I will say it very soberly, is that we would all be better off if he were. The fact is Satan is not in hell. He is loose on the face of the earth, and in the heavens above us. The book of Job is a good picture of that whole truth.

The account of the fall of man in Genesis, chapter 3, provides insight into the devices of Satan. He is allowed to tempt man into disobeying the revealed will of God. When a person is being led into action in line with Satan's suggestion and out of line with the will of God, there may not be any sense of wrongdoing. In fact this suggested course of action may seem to be the very thing the man should do. The man will always be able to present a good alibi. It will always seem to be the best action that he could have taken under the circumstances, but it could have been wrong all the way through.

As we read Hosea and note that Israel had begun to worship idols, it may seem to us that such conduct must have been a flagrant disregard of the Word of God and of their welfare. And it was. But we need to remember that far from it being an obvious disobedience, their taking up the practices and the procedures that were prevailing in the community, and endorsed by the public leaders, would actually seem to these people of Israel to be the very thing that should be done. These people might admit that these practices were different from the life-style of their forefathers, but they could easily encourage each other and themselves, that the new procedure was definitely better than the old. But God looks upon the heart. He knows really whether the worshippers were looking to Him or whether they were looking to the pagan gods.

And so we turn to Hosea, beginning in the 6th chapter at the 7th verse. Here we see that Hosea records that the turning to idols was a general practice. In fact he says "the company of priests" fell in with the trend of the times. Do you realize what that means in our day and time? This is what their preachers did. This is what the "church leaders" did. And let me tell you it is just as serious today as it was then. These priests were united, they were all of one mind, to endorse the ungodly actions of the people in adopting idol worship. What I would like to remind you is that idol worship would not necessarily look bad. It might not seem to be so completely off. One has to be careful to understand that such conduct could always seem to be "smart." It could seem to be clever. It could even seem to be good. This could seem to be a matter of being highly intellectual and intelligent. This could be for them a sophisticated way to understand about living. And this is how the people could be deceived. But this development, Hosea says, was a horrible thing in the house of Israel. Because of this, Israel was defiled. Certainly we can know this

is how it appeared to God. However, it is possible that no evidence of this condition of defilement was noticeable to the people.

We read on in chapter 7, and there we see that since Israel belonged to God and had learned in their history that God would help them, it was to have been understood that when they were in trouble, they would turn to God. God would be minded to help them. But when God would have helped Israel He found that Samaria, the northern nation, had wickedly departed from Him. They had ignored the fact that God would know and remember all their wickedness. They had allowed their evil desires to mount up until they were eager to commit sin. At the same time Hosea could write "there is none among them that calleth upon me." The northern nation had utterly forsaken God.

This northern nation, Ephraim, had become one with the world. In their consciousness they were aware only of what they desired; they had ignored the other side of the truth: that what they wanted was an abomination to the Lord. And it is so easy for any of us. We may look at some course of action which looks to be so very desirable. There are so many good things about it. If we are not careful, and we start acting on that basis, we are just as in the case of a person who did not turn the page over. We did not look at the other side of the matter. The other side of the matter was that it is not what God wanted. But Ephraim had not bothered with that. They were personally unaware of their own condition. In their pride they did not turn to God for help: they did not seek Him that they might find mercy.

We read further on in this chapter that when they did feel the need for help, because they did get to the place where they were in trouble, Israel turned to the natural aspect of life to find aid. Hosea writes "They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." But pagans would also have problems. In their ignorance of God they turned to the forces of nature for help. In their thinking they made idols of certain natural processes. Then they had developed procedures of worship in which they invoked these principles in nature to be operative in themselves. The northern nation, having turned away from God, came to the pagans. They came to these worldly secular minded people to learn how to cope with their problems. This action on their part offended God, so that He would overrule in their affairs, and chastise them for their foolishness.

In forsaking God, Israel had transgressed against Him. Although their history was marked by the great deliverance that God had brought to pass when He brought them out of Egypt, yet their thinking about God was based on lies about God. Impressions had been allowed to gather in people's minds, ideas had been scattered around which were contrary to their history. They had not repented before God, but they had actually rebelled against Him. Although God had nurtured them as a mother does her infant child, Hosea could write, "Yet do they imagine mischief against me." In their reaction to their experiences in living, these people did not turn to God.

And so in the 8th chapter Hosea announces a warning from God. The day of reckoning will come. While claiming to know God, they have foolishly turned elsewhere for help. They set up kings, but without seeking the guidance of God. Then they made idols to worship, for which God would destroy them.

The Lord was aware that Israel had turned to pagan worship. They could have realized their wooden idols had no power, since their own workman made the images. Many people will tell us, as if it were something new, that such persons do not really worship the idol, they worship what the idol represents. But that is just the point. What the idol represents is something that is of such a nature that they thought they could make an image of it, which is to say it is human all the way through. This can lead us to see that when men arrive at conclusions about God and His ways in their own minds, they should realize that what the human mind can construe about God another human mind can destroy. If I set up in my mind ideas about God, someone else can knock those ideas out of my mind. Any person putting his confidence

in himself and trusting his own opinion is revealing plainly that he is not turning to God for guidance. Someone might say "Well what can a human being do? After all a human being is just human." If you bring this right down to us, we will bring it right up to date: you could read the Bible. You could study the Scriptures, and in them you would find out. This is what God has taken into account, when we are thinking of Israel. He took into account that Israel went by their own opinions, so they made images of their own ideas, and worshipped those. He could then say "Mine anger is kindled against them."

While God is the Lord of all the earth, and all men are responsible to Him for what they do, God has a special interest in Israel to whom He showed Himself strong by delivering them and keeping them. He will not only judge them, but He will go after them to deal with them in a special way, because of His Covenant promises. I mean that when they turned away from Him, God revealed through the prophets that He would go after them and try to bring them back. And for us today we can pause here to pick up something for ourselves.

God knows about us, He knows about our waywardness, He knows about our limitations, but He is gracious and merciful. When we put our trust in Him, He will be faithful. Paul says in one place that even though we deny Him, He cannot deny Himself. He will always remain steadfast to that to which He has committed Himself. My salvation does not depend on my faithfulness, but on His faithfulness.

So in Hosea we read that God will go after His people when they have turned away from Him, to deal with them in a special way because of His Covenant promises. Apparently the northern nation built "many altars to sin" at which they worshipped other gods in which practice they defiled the worship of God Himself. So now God will cause these pagan shrines to be the very snare that will cause the enslavement of His people. The root of judgment of God is right in their worship. What a sad record this is! "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing" (Hosea 8:12). God holds His people responsible in a very special way! God showed them so much and when they turned away it was just that bad.

In chapter 9 there is a continuation of the revelation of God as to the cause and the extent of His judgment. Because of their known sin God will not hear them when they pray. Even though the prophets finally realized that their sin would be punished and told the people so, they could not stem the tide of popular esteem which had turned to their heathen gods. The judgment of God is a solemn fact:

"Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!" (Hosea 9:12).

God warned them.

"My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hosea 9:17).

There is a remarkable revelation here. In the first place this is a total sketch of the total apostasy of Israel. There is a very significant comment "Their heart is divided." They are interested in so many things. They love so many different items, instead of just loving God. One constructive word comes to designate these worshippers: for the present they are under judgment, but God intends to seek them out to bring them back. And this is possibly the reason why we turn to the book of Hosea with such confidence that here is a message of comfort to us all. Hosea sounds the call to repent amidst all the idolatrous practices, with the promise that their God really will appear and will bless them in His grace.

Let me read this in chapter 10 verse 12:

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

In all of this study, that we have been following through, our hearts can be heavy because of this natural

tendency on the part of man to drift away from God. But our spirits can rejoice in spite of all this God will be gracious and merciful and will actually work it around so that He can call these people back to Him and every willing heart can come into His presence to receive His blessing.

The Divine Parent

Hosea 11:1-11

In our study today Hosea changes the figure of speech that he has been using in referring to Judah. He has talked about Israel and about Judah as being the "wife" and then comments on their unfaithfulness to God. But now he is going to talk about them as the "child." In Hosea chapter 11 the prophet reveals the mind of God as He looks at Israel. He remembers how at the beginning of the nation of Israel He had taken a paternal interest. A father's interest in these people. And Hosea quotes the Word of God saying: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." A child does not know, but it must learn. It can learn and it must learn. A child does not know how, it must be taught and shown. A child is obviously dependent. Someone must take care of the child. When Israel was a child, then I loved him.

"Love" in the Bible use of the word does not involve emotion especially. Rather it indicates an attitude in which a person is doing something for someone else. John 3:16 is a marvelous passage of Scripture: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When you look at that verse you will see that the main thrust in that verse is the verb "gave." God gave. Whereas the focus in the whole verse is upon the words "so that." God gave His Son, so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish. This means to say that when Israel was just beginning as a nation, God gave benefits as a parent does to a child. God gave benefits to Israel in His grace that Israel might demonstrate to all men everywhere how God would bless obedience to His will.

But Israel did not respond in obedience. They actually turned away from God and that is the sorry and sad history of that nation. They sacrificed unto Baalim and they burned incense to graven images. We are not told what the promises or the pleasures were which accompanied pagan worship, but we can be sure that Israel was tempted to worship idols, that they might profit thereby. Baal was the name given to the god that was said to be able to manipulate natural forces. And for anyone who wished to prosper in this world's goods, the idea was that Baal could help because of his control of natural factors, which would be very attractive. Ashtaroth was the goddess of pleasure, and the worship practices included procedures that would give personal pleasures at once to those who worshipped. Whatever was the appeal, it seems obvious that Israel was attracted and persuaded to enter into pagan activities.

God remembers when He started out with Israel. He had helped Ephraim to learn to walk, by holding his arms. Now that expression in the Bible just refers to exactly what happens when you see a father or a mother standing back of the little baby and holding the child's arms so as to steady him so that he can learn to walk. He had helped Ephraim to learn to walk by holding his arms in his first attempts. But Ephraim never realized how God had helped him. That is one of the things that we learn about children. Oftentimes they don't realize what is being done on their behalf. Whenever Israel was in trouble, God

dealt in loving kindness with His people. He sought to win their confidence and their attachment by affectionate actions on His part. He had dealt with them as a man does with his ox when he loosens the harness to make things more comfortable for the ox. That is the language that Hosea uses. He had supplied food so that they would have an appreciation of His goodwill. But in spite of all this, Israel had forsaken God to serve Baal and Ashtaroath, seeking power and pleasure by following natural processes.

Hosea then proceeds to point out that certain results will follow. Israel will not go back to be slaves again in Egypt. Then they were as children. But their experiences had developed them to enable them to take a more sophisticated approach to their problems. They were older now and they would be tempted to commit themselves to pagan procedures which seemed to promise relief. They no longer acted like children. They were growing and they thought they could choose for themselves. They would turn to Assyria and to the wisdom of the East. As children they could not be held responsible for what was done. As slaves they were forcibly pressed to do certain things. But as they passed through their spiritual adolescence they became aware of their capacity to choose. They were enamored with the pretensions of pagan manipulation of natural processes. When they turned to Assyria they actually expected to prosper.

One immediate result would be that armed conflict would plague the country. God was on His throne. God saw the whole thing happening. And when He saw Israel turning to these pagan people, He took action. And one of these was to allow armed conflict, the sword, to come into the country. Following their own ideas led them into violence which would waste them. For Israel this was definitely an unnecessary loss. In their history they had learned that guidance from God would always be best. By depending on themselves they were doing what was less than their traditions taught them.

Yet Israel seemed to be determined to turn away from God. Such an attitude is of course very natural. It is due to the sinfulness that prevails everywhere in everybody. Humanly speaking it is manifested in early childhood. It is a common characteristic for a child to pull away from its parent and to turn away from the parent or any kind of adult supervision. Can't you just see that little boy in the store pulling away from his mother, trying to get his hand out of his mother's hand? Can't you see them going across the street and the little child, maybe, will put up with holding his mother's hand while they are in the street but the minute they get on the sidewalk, he yanks his hand away. That is human nature. Just in the very same way it is natural for a person not to want to go to church and not to want to go to prayer meeting. It is not natural for a human being to turn to God. If anybody does just what they want to do, they won't go to church, they won't go to prayer meeting, they won't read the Bible, they won't pray. And if you say "That's the way everybody does," I am sorry, you mean those are the people that you know. And they are in the majority. That's the way it is. It was that way there in the time of Hosea with the people of Israel.

God sent prophets to preach this word to Israel, calling them to come to God and to obey His will that they might be blessed. This was actually a great favor – but Israel did not appreciate it. They did not appreciate those prophets. They had no intention of exalting God, which would mean to appreciate Him for Who He is. They actually treated God as if He were a stranger, just as if He had never blessed them. This offended God in view of all that He had done for them.

We can be reminded of how often it is true that a person may have been blessed because of godly parents, and then when that person is older, and away from the influence of the godly home, he may move forward in living with a total disregard of God. It is a sobering and a saddening truth. Many and many a person whose father and mother were faithful worshippers of God has grown up on his own and is living a life and has a home in which God is not honored. Such a person can actually live day in and day out as if there were no God. In every situation where he feels need, a person may try to discover for himself how he should do. Then by turning to other human help: the teacher, the doctor, the lawyer, the psychologist, the

social worker, even to the preacher, this person may seek his welfare and his peace, trying to find somebody to do something for him. It is sobering to think how easily this can happen without the person realizing that he has done something serious in his relationship with God. It is so easy for a person who has never committed himself to seek blessing from God, to be quite unaware that in not turning to God in prayer to discover His will, that person is actually ignoring God and if he ever knew God, he is offending Him.

In Hosea chapter 11, verse 8 Hosea presents the cry of a grief stricken parent. God is shown as greatly distressed with the impending doom of Israel. It is going to happen and He is not happy about it. It is ever the distress of a parent who sees a child doing wrong incorrigibly, who then has nothing to expect but judgment unto doom. And so we read:

"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."

By the way these two cities mentioned "Admah" and "Zeboim" were cities that were involved in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah were two of the cities of the plain that were destroyed but there were other cities destroyed at that time, and here the prophet recalls Admah and Zeboim.

Another translator has rendered this verse from Hosea in these words:

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I let you go, Israel? How can I give you up like Admah or make you like Zeboim? My heart overturns within me, all my compassions kindle."

And then another translator taking this same passage words it like this:

"Oh, how can I give you up, my Ephraim? How can I let you go? How can I forsake you like Admah and Zeboim? My heart cries out within me; how I long to help you!"

And I couldn't help but think while I was going over that how very much that is the cry of the parents who see a child going forward in a foolish, willful, rebellious fashion. This is perhaps the most eloquent cry in the whole book. It reveals the pathos in the heart of God, when He saw that the true judgment which must fall on Israel would mean destruction for those people.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament prophecies this dilemma was solved by God sending His Messiah (the Christ) who would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, so that the remnant of believing Jews could be saved by the grace of God. Hosea does not fill this in, but of course he doesn't mean he doesn't agree with it, it doesn't mean that he wouldn't have it in mind, but that wasn't part of his preaching. But here in his message is a revelation of the heart of God as He faces in His own agony the impending just judgment upon Israel.

In Hosea chapter 11 verse 9, Hosea reveals the purpose of God to show grace to His sinning people. He does not reveal here how Christ will suffer to redeem and be raised from the dead to deliver those who will come to Him. But he does announce the gracious will of God which was afterwards fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the words that we read. Hosea reports this, God saying:

"I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man."

We could pause there and say "Thank the Lord." But here is the rest of that verse:

"The Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city."

This means to say "I am not coming in with judgment. I am not going to come in there to destroy."

Another translator again has expressed these thoughts in this 9th verse in words like this:

"No, I will not punish you as much as my fierce anger tells me to. This is the last time I will

destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man; I am the Holy One living among you, and I did not come to destroy."

And again another puts this thought in these terms. This is again a version of the 9th verse in Hosea, chapter 11.

"I will not let the heat of my anger burn; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God, not man, the Holy One among you; I came not to consume."

When Jesus of Nazareth was here He taught concerning Himself and His mission in words like this: "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." After all that Hosea has written to reveal clearly the righteous judgment of God, in this passage there is definitely a promise that the grace of God will be operative. Thank the Lord, God will save.

In verses 10-12 Hosea predicts plainly how the grace of God will function. Those who are to be saved will follow the Lord because He will be active in the situation. The words are "He shall roar like a lion" and I can tell you that that means to me the Messiah will come to engage in the conflict necessary to rescue His people. "When He shall roar" – "the children" will come trembling from everywhere: "from the west, out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria." In this way he predicted, Hosea predicted, that a great multitude will come to be saved in response to the call of God. Then Hosea reveals a definite prediction "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints."

In this latter portion of chapter 11 there is a definite prediction of what God has done that we know about through the Lord Jesus Christ, which is now declared to the whole world in the Gospel. It is unfortunately true that some who name the name of God as the northern nation did, Ephraim named the name of God, they will not avail themselves of the mercy of God offered to them in the salvation of Christ. While it is gloriously true that some will be redeemed and delivered because they humbly repent and commit themselves in faith to the Christ who can and will save them, it is also true that many will not humble themselves in repentance, but continue to depend upon the forces of nature and they will be lost. And the tragedy of this is they will be lost in spite of the sacrifice of Christ and the call of the Gospel. So Hosea is covering the whole area of God's dealing with Israel and Hosea is reminding them that God is patient. He started with them when they were like little children, He took care of them. And He gave them many benefits. He added many blessing to His people. And when they got to be older, old enough to as if they were act for themselves, they unconsciously (perhaps, may be they were not aware of what they were doing) turned their back on God. And again it is such a simple thing to think that what you can see in so many many cases in families and oh how parents dread that period of time when the children go on their own and seem to forget, they just seem to be totally oblivious, of everything that has been done for them. They turn out and into the world as if they had begun it, as if it was all in their hands, as if they don't owe anybody anything and as if they can do as they please. And any parent with any understanding at all has a sinking heart because they know very well that that course of action will bring trouble and disaster. And now so far as we humanly speaking are concerned, I don't know much that I can say what else a parent can do. I expect many and many a father and mother can die with a broken heart, just to think that their best efforts were for nothing. But Almighty God is able to overrule. He doesn't turn everybody His way, but He gives an offer. He makes a proposition, He calls people "Come unto me all ye that are weary and oppressed. Come unto me and I will give thee rest." That would be the people who have done wrong, the people who have been wrong, the people who have been out of the way, "Come unto me" is His great call. And He wants His people. He wants you and me who understand the Gospel to go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come in. God wants to save. And here in this 11th chapter of Hosea we

find the prophet beginning to put forward and to extend the hand of God extending to His people, "Let me do it for you. I can take care of you." We have a wonderful Savior!!

The Beginning In The End

Hosea 13-14

In the last two chapters of Hosea, the prophet begins to reveal the first rays of light of the new day that is coming. You can almost feel while you go through these passages that you can see the streaks of dawn of the new day. Perhaps you could call it the "Day of the Lord." All that he has said has been sadly but really true. Israel as the people of God had forsaken God, even as a wife forsakes her husband, even to the point of becoming a harlot as Hosea's wife had done. Israel had been like this, even as they turned with enthusiastic hope to the pagan procedures in worship in a way that offended Almighty God. Strangers might now know the will of God but Israel could have known, The fact that they forsook the Lord as they went to worship and serve Baal and Ashtaroth was known to God who was deeply angered by their unfaithfulness. He had been gracious to them. He had done for them and now God would reject them. But He wanted everybody to know why He was doing it. And so He had His prophets spell out the sins of the people and point out that their sins and their iniquities would not be forgiven. God would reject them even as they rejected God. That is one of the truths that is set forth in the Old Testament over and over but we ought not to think in our day and time that it is peculiar to the Old Testament. This belongs to God. God will be no man's fool. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. Now we know there are people who are going to be saved and we are going to be thinking about that. But the people will be saved by the grace of God under certain conditions. But now let me go on with the message as Hosea has it here.

Ephraim, which is the name that he uses for the northern nation, sometimes called Israel, had demonstrated again a basic principle in spiritual experience. The person who comes to God humbly will actually be favored. "Whosoever abaseth himself shall be exalted," but the very opposite is also true "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." "When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died" (Hosea 13:1). The fact is that sin has a way of increasing. Before they may have fully realized what they were doing, Ephraim had given themselves over to idolatry. They didn't start out that way but it came to that. The result would be that they would become as chaff "which the wind driveth away" (Psalm 1:4). This sad fate will take place even though it was God who had at first effected their deliverance, and taught them that there was no other god to be worshipped.

When we read in Hosea these words "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me" (Hosea 13:4) we are taken right back into the atmosphere of the Exodus. And again we see how God is leading the people out of the land of Egypt and along the way through the desert and then at Mount Sinai He revealed "Thou shalt have no other god before me." And He lays claim to their total attention and worship of Himself. This is something that we human beings need to face. We need to think about it. You might say "Well I don't see how the human heart could devote itself just to one idea." Let me tell you it already has. Any ordinary person that you will meet is thinking of one person – himself, herself. Now they may not all be crude, they may not all be

violent. They may not all be aggressive but that is the way it is. And I have in my own experience times when I had problems with certain people who were thinking about themselves in a negative way. They were so downhearted because of themselves. They were so afflicted because of themselves. And one of my problems was to get them to think about the Lord. The person who can have an idea about himself that he is no good, he is on sound footing, he has a real view of the real truth. Now get your eye off of that. God is good, the Lord Jesus Christ is good, so that a person may say as even the Apostle Paul said "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." That is the way the Apostle Paul put it, but he didn't let that burden him. Because he was delivered from that. He was looking forward into the fullness of life that was in Christ Jesus.

God does not forget that it was He, God, that called Abraham in the first place. It wasn't Abraham's idea. Abraham didn't come seeking God. God called Abraham and graciously promised to give Abraham prosperity and peace and blessedness. The blessing of Abraham, in the presence of God with His people, was given to Isaac and then to Jacob. The children of Israel were likewise graciously chosen that they might be examples to the whole world of people who have been blessed by God. And one of the ways in which that blessing would be set forth would be that God would dwell in their midst. Time and again God had helped Israel in battle so that they won over enemies that were stronger, but with the help of God they won, and blessed them with natural benefits in providence. They had good crops and rain fell on their land. God blessed them. Of all men Israel should have known that God was faithful and able. He had done so much for them. And again I feel like pausing and noting for myself and for you who look into this matter, if we have been well taken care of and we have been amply blessed, we need to praise God! Thank God! And I think that God would take a dim view of me overlooking that, of me forgetting that. Because I want to tell you if I forget that God has given me every good thing that I have, if I forget that, the first thing you know I will be proud and take it to myself. It is a dangerous route. When Paul told about the collapse, the deterioration of the whole world, the pagan world, he said that when they knew God they didn't glorify Him as God, neither were thankful. That is the underlying idea.

Now when the children of Israel finally entered the land, it was demonstrated over and over again without exception: when any king and his people humbled themselves, God gave them victory, prosperity and peace: when the people became vain and proud and that would show up when they thought of themselves and thought they were able, took it on themselves, so that they ignored God even as the prodigal could forsake his father, the outcome was distress and disaster. The same God who in grace and mercy lifted up the humble was the very One who would reject the proud. And James tells us that so plainly. "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble." God would resist the proud and leave them to their fate. Hosea emphasizes the misery of their rejection by using the figure of various wild animals to indicate the violence of God's judgment. Thus Hosea writes of God speaking of Himself "as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps . . ." and one understands by common reference that that would be a vicious being. "And there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them" (Hosea 13:7-8). Now that is the way God speaks of Himself the way He is going to deal with these people. Who are these people? Ugly people? Not necessarily. Wicked people in the sense that they have always been away from God? No. These are people who have known the blessing of God. These are people who have named God as their Lord but they have neglected Him. They have turned their back on Him.

Now such destruction of His people, which is sure to come, grieves the heart of God. I wish whenever we are talking about these things that we would never forget that passage of Scripture that says "God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Hosea reports the anguish of God who sees the result of this

judgment of Himself which is due to these people. The truth is that Israel had destroyed themselves, when all the time help was available in the grace of God. That is the tragedy of the whole thing. And it is the tragedy so often today. We have men and women on their own, doing as they see fit, running into all kinds of experiences and trying with all kinds of experiments to find some way to solve their life's problems and all the time God is available. God could be had. The poet, you will remember, says "It is only Heaven that is given away, it is only God that can be had for the asking." And that's the way it is. But these people did not recognize it. The truth is that Israel had destroyed themselves when all the time help was available in the grace of God. God would gladly have been their King. He offered to be their King, which means their Leader, their Director, their Manager, but Ephraim rejected God. The result would be for Ephraim that he would miss the blessing that was offered by God.

And now comes a wonderful note: but God will yet accomplish His purpose! This is an insight revealed in Scripture that you would never guess. God had told man what to do. Man sinned and then God found a way to save man. God created man for Himself, then man turned away. Then God found a way to bring man back and not offend righteousness. God would yet accomplish His purpose. In one verse we read that God will destroy, but in the very next verse we read the triumphant shout of praise: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." This is what you read in the 14th verse of chapter 13 of Hosea. It doesn't sound like anything we have heard up until now. But listen to God again: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." Our attention is drawn to I Corinthians chapter 15, verses 54-55 where Paul writes: "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" And I feel that this connection that we make here is justified. This is what I think it means, because the way God is going to be able to deal so in mercy is because Messiah has done His work.

If this seems confusing to us we can appreciate what Peter wrote when in the first epistle of Peter he writes about the prophets who "inquired and searched diligently . . . searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:10-12). This is a marvelous revelation of the ways of God. First would come death and then would come glory. And the Old Testament students studied this. How could this be true? How could the same person suffer unto death and be raised to rule in glory? The Old Testament prophets predicted the judgment of God unto death upon Messiah because of the sins of the people. You will read that in Isaiah 53. But also they predicted the glory of the Kingdom that the living Messiah would establish by the grace of God. The missing truth in the Old Testament report that makes all this fit into a logical pattern was not clearly seen in the Old Testament times. It was the resurrection of Christ in which He overcame death.

True Israel would be judged unto death for their incorrigible sinfulness, but you see all that sinfulness would be left in death. God could raise the dead into the newness of life through the power that raised up Christ from the dead. That does not change the reality of the judgment. Just as Christ Jesus really died, so we should really deny ourselves in Him. Though Ephraim may be very prominent, we read he will be devastated by the judgment of God. Hosea uses the expression "an east wind shall come" and this may well refer to Assyria. Coming from the east and coming in upon that land like a hot east wind would come in upon the crops, wilting them and destroying them. Assyria totally destroyed the northern kingdom.

Hosea wrote these words: "Samaria (and that was another name given to the northern kingdom) shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God."

But in an astounding display of mercy the Word of the Lord issues a call of repentance. Just listen to it: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips" (which is an expression which means that they would offer the sacrifice of praise). "Asshur shall not save us" (Asshur is another name for the city of Assyria). "We will not ride upon horses" (we will not put our trust in natural means). "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands," (the images that we have made, the idols that we have made) "Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." What a gentle and what a wonderful statement. "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy." (Hosea 14:1-3).

It is possible the people of Hosea's time could not grasp the truth of this revelation from God. Sin is real and they had sinned. They knew about that. What they needed to remember and needed to learn "grace is greater than all our sin!" In our time since Christ Jesus died and rose again it is easier for the human heart to grasp and to believe this precious truth. Paul explained in his Roman epistle how believers through faith should be crucified with Christ because of sin, and then how they could be raised into the newness of life through the resurrection.

To repentant believing souls the Word of God is rich in mercy. So let me read to you again this portion of the book of Hosea. Here we are in the last chapter, chapter 14 and I want to start reading at the 4th verse. Listen to these words:

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14:4-8).

All of this is an expression of the wonderful change of the whole scene and I am going to propose to you this is possible after Christ Jesus has died. On the basis of the death of the Savior we can be reconciled to God.

No wonder Hosea concludes his amazing prophecy as in this last verse. This is what he writes:

"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein" (Hosea 14:9).

Hosea had startled the whole world then until now by actually taking back into his home a woman that had been unfaithful to him. But he was demonstrating what Almighty God will do. The truth is that the Word of God speaks both death and life: death to the unrepentant and life everlasting to the repentant believer.