

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HOSEA

HOSEA

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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HOSEA CHAPTER 1

Hos. 1:1 *The beginning of the word of Yahweh that came to Hosea-* We will note on :2 that the word which came to Hosea was a call to live a life which reflected God's grace and anguish for Israel. The word that comes to us is likewise not simply lexical items and sentences of words, but a life lived in practice after the pattern of the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh as to a lesser extent Hosea was.

That came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel- Let's remember that the events in Hosea's life, according to the information in Hos. 1:1, occurred over a span of at least 30, and perhaps even 50 years. His love for Gomer was the love of a lifetime, the hope and pain of a lifetime. He was an amazing man, as Yahweh is an amazing God, to love to the end such a bad woman. It could be argued that the word that came to Hosea was to love and marry such a bad woman. For the book of Hosea appears to be entirely relevant to Israel at the end of their time in the land, just prior to the Assyrian invasion; and the appeals to Judah reference their partial faithfulness, which was relevant to Judah at that time. None of it, e.g.,

appears relevant to the time of Hezekiah. But Hosea's ongoing love for his wives was God's word to Israel and Judah throughout this long time period. And this in its turn reflects the long term love of the eternal God for His people. The judgments threatened in Hosea are sometimes hard to pin down, and this may be because his words were equally relevant to the judgments upon both Israel and Judah; hence as explained on :5, "the day of Jezreel" could refer to incidents within the judgments of both Israel and Judah.

Hos. 1:2 *When Yahweh spoke at first by Hosea*- The first time the word of the Lord came to Hosea, he was told to marry "a wife of whoredoms". Note that this was "the beginning of the word of the Lord" to him (Hos. 1:2- NEV "When Yahweh spoke at first by Hosea"). He'd have been tempted to just ignore it, to think he'd been dreaming something, to run away from it. But to his credit, he obeyed. According to the Mosaic Law, a whore should be burnt. She shouldn't be married. Hosea was told to break the letter of the Law, and marry a prostitute. And he was told to be a father to her "children of whoredoms". And so he began what was to be quite a theme in both his life and his prophecy- that in the face of sin, God shows His grace. We've likely all seen this in our own lives- at our very weakest moments, the kindness and care of God for us is revealed. Humanly, when someone does something wrong to us, we respond in anger and dissociation from them. The grace of God is quite the other way. In the very depths of Israel's unfaithfulness, God reminds them through the prophets of His love for them, and His plan to ultimately save them. But God's grace can't be abused endlessly. ..

Yahweh said to Hosea, Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery, forsaking Yahweh- See on Hos. 2:4 *Her children*. The extent of God's grace is powerfully reflected through the life of Hosea. Hosea was asked to manifest the love of God towards Israel, with all the emotional pain that this involved. The unfaithfulness of Gomer to Hosea represented Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness to God. The ten commandments taught that adultery was to be paralleled with idolatry. The two tablets each contained five commandments, and each of them were related to the other- thus the second commandment "You shall have no other gods" corresponds to the seventh, "You shall not commit adultery".

We could read this as saying that the word of Yahweh came to Hosea in that he was told to marry a prostitute. Prostitutes were to be burnt under the law. Not loved and married. Israel were condemned to destruction. But God wanted to marry them and offer them a new covenant and another marriage. Hosea was to live this out with Gomer. That word of God became flesh. In that Hosea's love for Gomer and feelings towards her were God's word of appeal to Israel. In this case, we can assume that the Hosea - Gomer relationship was very public knowledge to many in Israel.

There is the possibility that Hosea writes this looking back at what had happened, proleptically- just as Joseph after the event declared that God had sent him into Egypt (Gen. 45:5). Joseph didn't get a command to go into Egypt. He only later perceived that he had been sent there, and when he first went into Egypt, this was not because he was obeying any command to go there. Likewise Paul's conclusion that he had been set apart for missionary ministry from before his birth (Gal. 1:15). Possibly this is another example. Hosea, like God, married Gomer / Israel believing she was going to be faithful, but she wasn't. Or perhaps Hosea like God married this woman foreknowing what she would be like, but hoping that his love would change her and make her loyal to him.

The reference to "the land" in Hos. 1:2 ["a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery"]. is because the idea was that worshippers slept with cult prostitutes to symbolize how the gods slept with the land and made it fertile. Gomer's literal infidelity was in order to get material benefit from her lovers; she was addicted to both sex and materialism. She was probably herself a cult prostitute. And this spoke of how Israel literally slept with the cult prostitutes and committed spiritual prostitution against Yahweh, hoping for material blessing from the Baal cults. Hence Hos. 2:5 "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water". Yet Hosea provided Gomer all she needed, just as Yahweh did for His people.

Receipt of God's true revelation involved dialogue with God, even disagreement with Him for a moment, response, pleading, speech and counterspeech. It wasn't a case of merely passively hearing a voice and writing it down. Part and parcel of hearing the word of God and being inspired with it was to react to it in daily life- hence Ezekiel couldn't mourn for his wife, Hosea had to marry a whore as a reflection of God's love for Israel, Isaiah had to walk naked (Is. 3:17). Truly "The prophet threw his whole self into his prophecy, and made not his lips alone, but his whole personality, the vehicle of the divine 'word'" (H.H. Rowley, *The Servant Of The Lord* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) p. 118.). The inner accord which the prophets had with the mind and word of God led to their personalities being like God's.

Adultery of course implies that she wasn't adulterous at the time of marriage. Additionally, Andersen and Freedman argue on grammatical grounds that "a wife of whoredoms" in Hos. 1:2 means a wife who would become adulterous (F. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea* (London: Doubleday, 2004 ed.) p. 159.). No young man would surely marry a woman whom he knew would be adulterous later on. And yet perhaps in a way Hosea is saying that he did know this, but, his love for her was so strong, he married her. Just like God, when He met idol-worshipping Israel in the wilderness. They carried through the desert their god Remphan and the tabernacle of Moloch with them, as well as Yahweh's tabernacle. And yet it was there that Yahweh, the God who knows the future and the destiny and spiritual path of every man, fell in love with them and spread His skirt over them in love and delight and betrothal (Ez. 16,23). Just as Hosea did. For he married Gomer bat Diblaim (Hos. 1:3)- which was apparently the name for a temple prostitute (H.W. Wolff, *Confrontations with Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 17).

Hos. 1:3 *So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; and she conceived, and bore him a son-* See on :2. The usual Biblical rubric for describing conception and birth is to say that a man goes in to a woman, she conceives, and bears a child. Hos. 1:3 says that Gomer conceives and bears a son to Hosea; there is no mention that he 'went in' to her, and in Hos. 1:6,8 we are told simply that Gomer conceived. The way the final child is called Lo-ammi was because "ye are not my people" (Hos. 1:9). This suggests that although Hosea did presumably have sexual relations with Gomer, these children were not actually conceived from him- i.e. she was continuing her relations with other men. This suggestion is confirmed by the way that Hosea asks the children when they are older to plead with their mother to stop her adultery (Hos. 2:2). Hosea explains further: "Their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers..." (Hos. 2:5).

"Gomer" means 'Enough!' or 'complete'. Hosea prophesied at the time the 10 tribe kingdom of Israel were about to go into captivity for their prostitution. His book and his life were therefore a last mintue appeal to them to repent and accept God's love for them- even though their sin was complete, it had gone far enough, and they had to be

judged. But even then, Yahweh was desperate to save them, and still desperately loved them. "Diblaim" in Hebrew rhymes with "Ephraim", Hosea's favourite description of "Israel". So again the connection between Gomer and the 10 tribes is further cemented.

Hos. 1:4 *Yahweh said to him, Call his name Jezreel-* Hosea has to name the subsequent children Jezreel, speaking of God's plan to avenge Himself and "to cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel", Lo-ruhamah ("for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel") and Lo-ammi ("for you are not my people") (Hos. 1:4,6,9). Hosea isn't the only example of a person being taught by personal experience how God Himself feels. The whole parenting experience is another example. Or take Amos' message to Amaziah: "Your wife shall be a harlot in the city [Bethel- the house of God], and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land [i.e. Amaziah's personal family plot] shall be parcelled out by line" (Am. 7:17 RSV). It was God's wife who acted as a harlot in the house of God, it was God's children who fell by the sword, it was God's land which was divided to others. But He wanted Amaziah to know how it feels, to some extent, to be God. And in our lives there are multiple examples [if we perceive them] of Him doing likewise, in seeking to explain to us how He, our Father, really feels.

For yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu- God sees that our behaviour can be read on more than one level; the same action has elements of righteousness and sin within it. Thus Jehu's massacre at Jezreel was commanded by God, and Jehu was praised for his obedience in doing it (2 Kings 10:30,31), but he was also condemned for it (Hos. 1:4). Yet we simply cannot make such analysis, although we must recognize that this is in fact how God analyzes. And for this reason alone, we are quite unable to anticipate the outcome of the judgment with regard to other believers.

We see an example of God's sensitivity in this prophecy that the blood of Jezreel would be visited upon the house of Jehu (Hos. 1:4). At Jezreel, Jehu had killed Ahab's family in a quite literal bloodbath. And God had commented that because Jehu had done this and thus fulfilled His word, Jehu's family would reign for the next four generations (2 Kings 10:30). So why, then, does Hosea start talking about punishing the house of Jehu for what they did to the house of Ahab? Jehu became proud about the manner in which he had been the channel for God's purpose to be fulfilled, inviting others to come and behold his "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Jehu and his children showed themselves to not really be spiritually minded, and yet they prided themselves in having physically done God's will. And because of this, Hosea talks in such angry terms about retribution for what they had done; the house of Jehu's act of obedience to God actually became something his family had to be punished for, because they had done it in a proud spirit. We see this all the time around us. Men and women who clearly are instruments in God's hand, like the Assyrians were, doing His will... but being proud about it and becoming exalted in their own eyes because of it. And Hosea is so sensitive to the awfulness of this, he goes ballistic about it.

And will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease- This would have reference to the ending of Jehu's dynasty with the death of Jeroboam II at Jezreel (:5).

Hos 1:5 *It will happen in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel-* This could refer to judgments upon both Israel and Judah at different times; see on :1. "The bow" refers to human strength. And this was to be broken. It

was whilst Israel felt strong that they committed adultery against God, and we see this reflected in how men who feel 'strong' in various areas of human life tend to then become sexually promiscuous. Judah were defeated here by the Assyrians, to whom Hosea refers specifically in his later prophecies,; but even then, through the ministry of Isaiah and Hezekiah there was the possibility of salvation. And this grace and opportunity within Divine judgment is to be typical of Hosea. The more obvious fulfilment is to the ending of Jehu's dynasty with the death of Jeroboam II at Jezreel (:4); this may also be the reference of Hos. 10:14. Zechariah who followed him was not from that dynasty, and in that sense the "bow" or dynasty ended (Ps. 127:4).

To break a bow is a figure common in Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions; it refers to a military defeat. But when were Israel militarily defeated at Jezreel? Perhaps this was a threat made that God didn't carry out, just as Hosea threatens Gomer with things that he doesn't carry out. But "Jezreel" also means 'God sows'. Within this threat of destruction there is the hint of hope, that a phoenix will arise, some potential new life will be sown. Likewise we read that the calley of Achor, the symbol of Achan's permanent destruction and barring from entering the Kingdom, will become a "door of hope". And so Hosea's threats to Gomer also include within them the latent hope that somehow, their hopeless relationship will come to loving fruition.

Hos 1:6 *She conceived again, and bore a daughter. Then he said to him, Call her name Lo-Ruhamah-* See on :4. "I will no more have grace" was how Hosea doubtless felt, having had mercy upon Gomer over so many incidents; and now again she conceives by another man. This reflects the just anger of God at sin, that as it were flares up in His face. But the tortured prophecy and experience of Hosea comes to the conclusion that God like Hosea will in fact allow mercy to triumph over judgment. "I will not have pity / mercy / compassion" alludes to how pity / mercy is at the heart of God's Name and covenant relationship (Ex. 34:6). We will see on :9 that God was abrogating His own Name and being by saying this. So it was said with difficulty, as a reflection of the extreme difficulty God felt in ending His covenant relationship with His people. Even if they from their side had long ago broken that covenant.

For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, that I should in any way pardon them- Even if this is applied to the 'utter taking away' [Heb.] of the ten tribes, there were still plans for their restoration and ultimate salvation, as various of the prophets make continually clear. "Have mercy" effectively means 'to forgive'. Here we see how Hosea is going to vacillate between such feelings, and on the other hand, an amazing forgiveness. Likewise, there are statements in Hosea that Hosea / God will slay Gomer / Israel, send them to Egypt... and yet also, "love them freely" and save them. This merges seamlessly into an explanation of how God feels, with "repentings kindled together", wanting to not forgive but coming to forgive. His forgiveness is hereby demonstrated to certainly not be automatic, to involve a process and a struggle, and to be painful.

Hosea spoke in God's Name. He would've known how that Name was a memorial of the characteristics of God, His pity, mercy, forgiveness etc. as outlined in Ex. 33:19. And yet Hosea uses those very words in saying that now, God will not have mercy, pity or forgiveness toward Israel. But Hosea spoke in the Name of Yahweh; and predicted that the Yahweh who had been their *elohim* from the land of Egypt, would still be their God (Hos. 12:9). In this we see Hosea's personal involvement in the tension of God; for he spoke in God's Name, with all that Name

implied. And we too carry that Name, having been baptized into it. And we speak in that Name to this world, bearing within us the same conflict between the reality of future judgment, and the earnest grace of God to save this world. Hosea's prophecy concludes by declaring the victory over the pole of God's graciousness over that of His necessary judgment of sin. "I will love them freely", with the freedom of Divine grace. And yet that final Divine position is arrived at through all the anger against sin which there has to be.

Hos 1:7 *But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by Yahweh their God, and will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen-* As noted on :6, this was how God felt at the time. As I will note on :11, God's purpose changed in this matter of rejecting Israel and saving Judah. But later prophecies indicate His desire for the repentance, salvation and final ingathering of the ten tribes as well as Judah; and eventually He has to judge Judah as He judged Israel, with Ezekiel pointing out that Judah ended up even more sinful than Israel. We see here that just as Hosea's feelings ebbed and flowed, so it is with God. He is not capricious nor unstable; it's just that His gracious, saving love ends up stronger than His desire and necessity of judging sin. When we say that "God is love", we must remember the tortuous internal path that He has travelled to that point.

"I will save them..." alludes to the meaning of 'Hosea'- 'to set free, to save' or 'he has set free, he has saved'. It is the component of 'Ya-hoshua', Yah saves, 'Jesus'. This was what Hosea stood for- saving his wife, through much internal suffering. God is saying 'I will be Hosea to them'. Clearly we have established that Hosea is going to represent the saving love of Yahweh. And he plus 'Yah' becomes 'Yahoshua', Jesus, so here we see an OT anticipation of the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

A fair translation of :6,7 would be:

"No longer will I have compassion on the house of Israel
let alone that I would forgive, yes forgive them
but on the house of Judah I will have compassion
and I will set them free by Yahweh their God".

This would imply that Judah had also sinned, but they would be shown compassion and given freedom, a figure for forgiveness. The truth was that God did forgive Israel. But in the short term, recalling that Hosea prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah, He did send Israel into captivity whereas He forgave Judah and saved them- at Hezekiah's time. But that forgiveness was on the basis of grace alone, for there was no evidence that there was much loyalty to Yahweh in Hezekiah's time. As Isaiah often says, they were saved from the Assyrian encirclement of Jerusalem not by human sword, bow etc., but by Yahweh's Angelic cherubim.

Hos 1:8 *Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son-* Breast feeding is often a natural form of contraception. For her to become immediately pregnant as soon as she had finished breast feeding could indicate a sexual obsession on her part, which will be noted later. And the child she conceived was not Hosea's people (:9), again, she had been unfaithful to him.

Hos 1:9 *He said, Call his name Lo-Ammi; for you are not My people, and I will not be yours-* The implication is that Gomer fell pregnant not by Hosea but by her lovers at the idol sanctuary. This is confirmed by God's later statement that Israel had been unfaithful to Him (as in Jer. 3:20) and had given birth to foreigners' children (Hos. 5:7).

Lo-Ammi- See on 1:3,4. Hosea names his child [if indeed he was the father of it], 'Not my people'. Consider his hurt, to reject a child from his family. This was God's hurt. God, like Hosea, had no other children, no other people. For God to say to Israel 'You are not My people' would leave God without a people, as it were alone in the earth. Hosea shared the tragic loneliness of God. In the end, God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. But that final position of God was as it were arrived at through the traumatic process of feeling just as Hosea did, that 'these are not My children'. We are left to imagine the web of lies, crocodile tears and fake repentances all spun by Gomer, and the endless tug upon the heart strings of Hosea because, quite simply, he so loved her. And all this God experiences oftentimes with man, with us, with you and me. For all our sins and modern day idolatries are symbolized in her behaviour.

"I will not be yours" is literally "I will not be". It is a play on the Yahweh Name. Literally 'I will not be', the inversion of 'I will be who I will be'. The same root verb "to be" is used as in the YHWH Name. The Hebrew simply reads as the negative of the Yahweh Name. To the Hebrew mind, to this day, this is just a terrible thing to say, read or hear. It verges almost on the blasphemous and inappropriate, as does so much in Hosea. Yahweh was the covenant Name, and the idea is surely that just as Hosea wanted to break his marriage covenant with Gomer, so Yahweh wanted to stop being Yahweh for Israel and thus end the covenant. "I will not be" Yahweh is also tantamount to suggesting the death of Yahweh, who by nature is "I who will be". This shocking idea is found in similar passages that speak of Israel as a young woman who was left widowed- her husband, Yahweh, had as it were died. The figure reflects how God felt He had died in the death of Israel, showing for all time the truth of the oft observed fact: that something of us dies in the death of those we love. Poets, writers, artists of all human societies have come to that realization. For in this way, man in his usual path through life, losing loved ones along the way, is prepared for his own death. For Hebrew man, to be bereft of wife and children was to become nothing, to 'not be'. And this is how Yahweh felt. Without Israel, He 'was not'. In this we see the extent to which God is as it were in need of man. Without His woman Israel, He like Hosea was left ashamed, humiliated, a laughing stock to other men, the rejected lover whose honour has been violated, and who is seeking another path for that love. Yahweh presents as having great internal pain and torture of mind, eaten up with unresolve, failing to resolve the situation- just as Hosea experienced. He emerges as a wounded God, bent on resolution. Which is where, finally, we come in to the picture. And where at the end of Hosea we read of Yahweh planning to *make* His people loyal in ways only He can- through His Spirit. The whole story is amazing and even mysterious, such is the insight into God's love. Thus Hosea concludes with the challenge, 'Who can understand this?'.

Hos 1:10 *Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which can't be measured nor numbered-* The promises to Abraham would be fulfilled, despite such unfaithfulness; and they are the basis of God's new covenant with all those baptized into the Lord Jesus. Constantly in Hosea we see the paradoxes within grace, or at least, so they appear to men. Those who were "not My people" (:9) were still going to be God's people because they were beloved for the fathers' sakes, they were the seed of Abraham which would be as the sand of the sea. It is this paradox of utter grace which is the context in which this verse is quoted by Paul in Romans.

The "yet" has massive implications. Although Yahweh / Hosea threaten to end the marriage covenant, there is hope [as made explicit in Hos. 2] that the marriage will be restored. A new marriage covenant will be entered into. The reference to

blessing like "the sand of the sea" in Hos. 1:10 alludes both to the promises to Abraham [which were the basis of the new covenant] and to common marriage blessings. The wife was wished fertility like the sand of the sea. So it is the new covenant which is offered to Israel- which Paul says is based on the promises to Abraham rather than the law given on Sinai.

And it will come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them- "In the place..." is hard to interpret. It may not have any geographical reference. It may simply mean "instead of being told 'You aren't My people', you will be told 'You are sons of the living God'". Perhaps it is Jezreel, or Jerusalem, although there is no specific reference to that being the place where they were told of their rejection. It was in exile that they were "told" they were not God's people; so the Chaldee reads: "And it shall come to pass in the place where they lived in exile among the peoples...". The potential possibility was that there in Babylon they would have a spiritual revival and return to being God's children. But most of the exiles preferred to remain there when the time for restoration came. This then becomes one of many prophecies of what could potentially have happened at the restoration which didn't come to pass because Israel would not.

'You are not My people', they will be called 'sons of the living God' - When Lomami was born and named "you are not my people", *immediately* the prophet is inspired to make a tender prophecy of Israel's final glory: "You are not my people, and I will not be your God. *Yet* the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea...it shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1:9,10; another example is in Hos. 12:8,9; 13:8,9). The word to circle in our Bibles is "*yet*". In the face of all Israel's sin, in the face of the inevitable judgment which this attracted, in the very moment when it is declared, God goes on to speak of His loving salvation. This is so hard for humans to take on board, called as we are to manifest this same grace of God. In the heat of the moment of others' sin against us, we rarely find it in us to think let alone speak of their ultimate hope of salvation by grace. But this is the challenge of Hosea.

The reference to "the living God", the God who gives life, is because the Baal cults claimed to give life. Yahweh would be accepted, He hoped, as the source of life. Not Baal.

Hos 1:11 *The children of Judah and the children of Israel will be gathered together-* Remember that Hosea was a prophet to both Judah and Israel. Again we have a paradox, for in :7 we read of God's original plan to end things with Israel but save Judah. This apparent irrationality, or bouncing between two opposite positions very quickly, is exactly how Hosea would have felt each time he realized Gomer had fallen pregnant by another man. The potential possibility was that at the time of Judah's restoration from Babylon, the ten tribes would also return, and the Kingdom of God re-established in the land with a Messiah King, and the temple rebuilt in Zion according to the plans of Ez. 40-48. But this didn't happen, because Israel and Judah didn't repent, and most preferred to remain in the lands of their exile; they preferred exile to restoration, just as many do in essence today. For the gospel of the restoration of the kingdom under the new covenant is in essence the same Gospel preached by us today.

And they will appoint themselves one head, and will go up from the land- The allusion is to how Israel had appointed themselves a leader to return to Egypt (Num. 14:4). But that will be changed; instead they "will go up from the land" under this chosen ruler, just as they went up from Egypt towards Canaan (Ex. 13:18). That exodus is continually alluded to in the restoration prophets, as the prototype of the

restoration from Babylon and even Assyria. It was God's dream that they would reverse their previous unfaithfulness, just as Hosea dreamt that Gomer would; we see the same kind of reasoning in Hos. 2:15, where the valley of Achor, symbol of Israel's previous unfaithfulness, is to be turned into "a door of hope".

For great will be the day of Jezreel- "Jezreel" is literally 'the sowing of God', and the same word for 'sow' is found in Hos. 2:23, where God says that "I will sow her unto me in the earth". In line with the reversal of Israel's historical shame mentioned earlier in this verse, so the place of their previous defeat and judgment (see on :4) would be turned into the place of their being sown by God, to rise up in resurrected life. For this is how the metaphor of sowing is understood in 1 Cor. 15. Israel and Judah had been sown amongst the nations of their dispersion, but God's hope was that they would arise from there and again enter covenant relationship with Him and bring forth fruit to Him (Jer. 31:10). This was Hosea's hope of Gomer, but that never seems to have come true; and in a sense it was the same for God in that His people were unwilling to make the restoration which He had envisaged and potentially enabled.

HOSEA CHAPTER 2

Hos 2:1 *Say to your brothers, 'Ammi! [My people]!' and to your sisters, 'Ruhamah! [I will have mercy!]'* - In an attempt to bring about Gomer's repentance, Hosea addresses his children as "Ammi" and "Ruhamah", i.e. 'my people' and 'I will have mercy' - purposefully changing the names God had given them. On this basis he appealed for Gomer's repentance: "Let her therefore put away her prostitution" (Hos. 2:2). As Paul was to later say in so many words, the mercy and grace of God is intended to lead us to repentance. Rather than that grace leading to a laissez-faire indifference and continuance in sin, the very reality of His grace to us in our weak moments should of itself inspire our repentance. But there is of course a limit, if we continually refuse: "Lest I strip her naked...and slay her" (:3). We too at baptism are given the new name, righteousness in Christ is imputed to us, but we must live in practice how we are considered in status. Through appealing to the children, Hosea was hoping to win back the heart of their mother. And something similar was going on in God's prophetic appeal to the children of Zion. "Not my people" being called "my people" is understood by Paul as referring to the Gentile converts to Christ who are counted as spiritual Israel. And their conversion was intended to provoke the mother, Zion, Israel after the flesh, to repent and turn to God again.

"Say to your brothers..." may be a message to Judah, to take the good news to their brothers in Israel- that a new start, a new covenant was possible. The imperative plural of the "say..." means it is addressed to a group of people. They are to appeal / contend (:2) with the ten tribes, appealing for them to return to Yahweh. Although we note that Judah are also severely criticized as the prophecy goes on, with Judah being the second whore whom Hosea marries in Hos. 3. In the Hosea-Gomer relationship, we can assume that by this point the children have grown to be old enough to appeal to their mother and brothers.

It was part of God's purpose, tied up in His very Name, that "I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7). There are seven statements of "I will..." in Ex. 6, making these statements part of the meaning of the Name "I will be who I will be". But by saying Israel were not His people, and He was not their God, Yahweh was denying His very own Name. Just as we noted on Hos. 1:9 that God negated the very "I am that I am" Name of Yahweh, by saying "I will *not* be...". As if to say, "I am not I AM for you". Yahweh presents as so eager to be who He really and

essentially is, a God with a people, and not a wayfaring man without a home and a people (Jer. 14:8 "why should You be as a foreigner in the land, and as a wayfaring man"). Just as we can infer that Hosea was a man built and wired to be married, to be a good husband and father to the children that would ensue. So God's fantasy here is understandable- that the people He had disowned would become His people truly, in spirit and truth.

Hos 2:2 *Contend with your mother! Contend, for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband*- This is Hosea feeling that he has divorced Gomer, and yet he continually affirms his total love and commitment to her as his wife. He calls the children to "contend", a word usually used in a legal context of pleading, as if the children were to be involved in the divorce case. This fluctuation of emotion is understandable for Hosea. But it points forward to the internal conflict within God as regards His people. "She is not my wife, neither am I her husband" is a verbatim quotation from various Babylonian divorce formulas, and was later incorporated into the Talmud as a divorce formula (Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 p. 122). Likewise the threat to strip her naked (Hos. 2:3) was what was done in the case of divorce for adultery; Hosea's threat to withdraw her clothing, her "wool and flax [linen]" in Hos. 2:9 likely refers to the same thing. Yet Hosea keeps wanting Gomer to return to him; he wishes to divorce her, and yet in his heart keeps coming back to her. This was an exact reflection of God's feelings for His people. Remember that it was enough then, as it is today in some societies, for a husband to simply proclaim "You are not my wife". And that was enough for divorce. Here Yahweh / Hosea say this. It is a divorce. But we immediately read: "Let her *therefore*" stop her adultery. It was a divorce uttered with the passionate hope of a remarriage.

And let her therefore put away her prostitution from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts- Song 1:13 speaks of myrrh between the breasts being used as an aphrodisiac; and prostitutes paint their faces in Jer. 4:30 and Ez. 23:40. The judgment of removing the signs of adultery from Gomer's face and from between her breasts also give a window into the level of her sexual addiction. They were likely the signs that she was a cult prostitute. "Her adulteries" is proof enough that she had committed adultery against Hosea and the children were not his; see on 1:3 *She conceived*.

2:3 *Lest I strip her naked, and make her bare as in the day that she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land*- This was the punishment for a prostitute, a punishment which she should've had right back at the start. But instead of this punishment, Hosea had married her. We are perhaps nervous to equate our sinfulness, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness, with Gomer's prostitution. But this, surely, is what we are intended to do, and to thereby perceive the extent of God's patient love toward us, to the end that that grace and goodness might lead us to repentance. Because Hosea had loved this woman, he had feelings of anger- he desired to strip her naked and slay her, to "discover her lewdness in the sight of all her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand" (Hos. 2:10). These feelings were quite natural. Hosea was the wounded lover, the betrayed man. And these are exactly the feelings of God over the unfaithfulness of His people.

The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers; all similar to the language of having her nose cut off and

left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. Those who find this language over the top... need to ask whether they have rightly understood the nature of sin, and the undoubted existence of the wrath of God [just read Romans 2, as well as the prophets]. The fact we in Christ are "saved from wrath through Him" only has wonder and meaning if we appreciate that God's wrath is real. Even though, as with the wrath of Hosea, it is all a part of love. For truly "the wrath of God is the love of God". So often the wrath of God is considered an outdated idea, never to be mentioned. But it's rather like the Victorians thought of sex- never to be spoken of, but accepted as present.

And kill her with thirst- The punishment intended for Hagar, which was again rescinded by grace. All the allusion to the wilderness and thirst is to give insight into how God felt toward Israel in the wilderness, when He wanted to destroy them for still worshipping the Egyptian idols; but by grace alone He did not.

Let's remember that God's own law was pretty clear about adultery. The adulterous woman was to be punished with death- for one act of adultery. Even if she repented. And in any case, it was a defiling abomination [according to the Mosaic Law] to remarry a divorced wife. But Hosea doesn't strictly keep the law; his love and grace are beyond it. He lets his wife commit multiple acts of adultery, and he still loves her and pleads with her- even though he was a man in love with God's law. And this reflects the turmoil of God in dealing with human sin, and His sinful people. Hosea outlines his plan in Hosea 2. He will hamper her movements so she can't find her lovers; if she does find them, he will take away her food and clothing, so she appreciates his generosity to her; and if she still doesn't return, he will expose her naked and shamed in front of her lovers. But there's no evidence Hosea ever did that. He just... loved her, was angry with her as an expression of that love, loved her yet more, yet more... And this perhaps too reflects God's mind- devising and declaring

judgments for Israel, which are themselves far less than what He has earlier stated in His own law, and yet the power of His love means He somehow keeps bearing with His people. Even in the context of speaking of His marriage to Israel, God says that He will punish them "as women that break wedlock are judged" (Ez. 26:38; 23:45). And yet, He didn't. His love was too great, His passion for them too strong; and He even shamed Himself by doing what His own law forbade, the remarriage to a divorced and defiled wife. Perhaps all love involves a degree of paradox and self-contradiction; and a jealous, Almighty God in love was no different. This, to me, is why some Bible verses indicate God has forsaken Israel; and others imply He hasn't and never will. Somehow, even right now, the Jews you meet... are loved still by their God. And he still fantasizes, in a way, over their return to Him. Imagine His utter joy when even one of them does in fact turn to Him! That alone motivates me to preach to Israel today.

Hos 2:4 *Indeed, on her children I will have no mercy; for they are children of unfaithfulness*- Hosea appears to have been speaking about the children on his own account, whilst also thereby manifesting the spirit, feelings and words of Yahweh about His people Israel. Hosea's mood swings, alternating between love and anger, reflected God's.

Hosea had initially been told to marry Gomer and also take on her "children of whoredoms" into his family (Hos. 1:2), so it would seem unlikely that his rejection of Gomer's children because "they be the children of whoredoms" refers to them. Surely he refers to what appeared to be 'his' children, whom she had borne after her marriage to him. Note how he calls them "her children". The children are described by Hosea as "her children" rather than "my children" (Hos. 2:6,7)- as if they were not his, although she bore them whilst newly married to him. Indeed, Gomer appears to reason in Hos. 2:14 that the children were her lovers' payment to her for her sexual services. And in the parallel relationship between God and Israel, Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh and "engendered foreign children" (Hos. 5:7). We can learn much about the nature of Gomer's behaviour with Hosea by seeing how Israel are described subsequently in Hosea's prophecy. So often they are spoken of in terms of an unfaithful woman, and we are surely intended to understand that they were epitomized by the woman Gomer. So we can 'read back' from what is said about Israel in the prophecy to Gomer personally. God made the accusation that "[Israel] have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children", whilst at the same time claiming to keep the sacrifices and Sabbaths of the Law (Hos. 5:6,7; 2:11). This would confirm that Gomer acted as Hosea's wife, assuring him of her faithfulness, in the same way as the sacrifices and Sabbaths were intended to reflect Israel's exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh.

Throughout the book, Hosea clearly speaks on God's behalf, even though he at times speaks in the first person. It's hard at times to realize whether Hosea is talking about his own marriage, or about God's feelings to Israel. And that's understandable, given the view of inspiration we have been discussing. The feelings of Hosea were God's feelings; He was inspired with the spirit / mind / attitude of God Himself. Thus here in Hos. 2:4-25 we appear to have a monologue in which Hosea speaks to his wife and kids; but he speaks to them as if it's God speaking. So close was his identity with God's feelings as a result of the pain of his failed marriage and family life. See on Hos. 3:2.

Hos 2:5 *For their mother has played the prostitute. She who conceived them has done shamefully; for she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink' -* See on Hos. 1:3. Notice how her conception of the children is said to have been “shameful”. And in addressing the children, Hosea never calls them ‘his’ children. The list of things here refer to basic food and clothing, and these were what a husband was bound to provide for his wife. But what Hosea provided for her, she liked to understand as what her lovers had given her. "My lovers" presumably refer to the men with whom Gomer had relationships before she married Hosea, and to whom she returned ("I will go..."). This clearly speaks of how Israel returned to the idols of Egypt which they brought with them through the Red Sea, and which they continued worshipping after their marriage covenant with God at Sinai. The good things Yahweh provided for Israel as the blessings of the covenant, they assumed arose from their idol worship. And they thanked their idols for what Yahweh had in fact provided. All this has strange and biting relevance for us. We too can assume that the idols of careers, investments and hard work are what give us the daily blessings which are ultimately from God and not anything else.

The reference to "the land" in Hos. 1:2 ["a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery"]. is because the idea was that worshippers slept with cult prostitutes to symbolize how the gods slept with the land and made it fertile. Gomer's literal infidelity was in order to get material benefit from her lovers; she was addicted to both sex and materialism. And this spoke of how Israel literally slept with the cult prostitutes and committed spiritual prostitution against Yahweh, hoping for material blessing from the Baal cults. Hence Hos. 2:5 "I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water". Yet Hosea provided Gomer all she needed, just as Yahweh did for His people.

To "go after" can refer to both going after a partner (as in Ruth 3:10, 'you didn't go after other men'), and to go after idols or a God to worship. Gomer's going after other men represented Israel's going after idols. But Yahweh / Hosea would block her path to this 'going after' (:6), just as God desperately tries to stop men from apostasy from Him. Possibly Hosea built a literal wall and planted a thorn bush to stop Gomer leaving the property. He didn't shrug and let a bad woman go her miserable way. Neither does God with us. Just as the Valley of Achor was a blocked entrance into the Kingdom that was to be turned into a gate of Hope, so the hope was that the blockage of Gomer / Israel would lead to her entrance into a renewed relationship under a new covenant, with Yahweh / Hosea.

Hos 2:6 *Therefore behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, that she can't find her way-* In Ezekiel, building a wall against Zion God's people refers to the siege of Jerusalem. Hosea planned to put Gomer in a position where she couldn't find her way to her lovers, and then she would return to Hosea. We can assume from the language of going and returning in :5 and :7 that she had left Hosea and was living with them. Hosea planned to make her 'way' there difficult, hedging the path with thorns and building a wall to stop her in her path. "Thorns" were the punishment for Adam and Eve's sin; the consequences of her sin were intended to lead her to repentance. Rather like God tried to stop Balaam on his path to apostasy from Him. And this was all reflected in God's besieging Zion through their invaders; and being hedged in is the language of the Babylonian invasion in Lam. 3:7,9. It was judgment, but it was all intended to bring Israel back to Him. And

thus in wrath God remembers mercy; His judgments are not simply statements of anger, but designed to elicit repentance, at least on a national scale.

Hos 2:7 *She will follow after her lovers, but she won't overtake them; and she will seek them, but won't find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now'*- See on 2:8. In the same way as Hosea had this plan to get Gomer to "return" to him, so God likewise planned that "afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God" (Hos. 3:5). Both God and Hosea thought that "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence... in their affliction they will seek me early" (Hos. 5:15). But it didn't work out like this. Both God with Israel and Hosea with Gomer ended up pleading with her to return (Hos. 14:1); "and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this" (Hos. 7:10). It was and is a tragedy. In our preaching to Israel, indeed to mankind generally, we are pleading with them to accept this most unusual love. The pain of God, the way He is left as it were standing there as a tragic figure, like Hosea was, of itself inspires us to plead with people all the more passionately. Notice in all this that 'return' is probably an idiom; neither Hosea nor Gomer appear to have physically split up, but both of them had 'left' the other one, as in so many marriages today. The intention was that Gomer would "go and return" to Hosea as Israel and Judah would. But when the opportunity for the restoration came, most of them preferred to stay in the lands of their exile. And this was prefigured in how it seems Gomer didn't in fact fully return to Hosea. The call to return to God was because He was still married to Israel (Jer. 3:14; Is. 54:5).

The image of the unfaithful wife played deeply on male fears of female sexuality. Hosea was a Hebrew male. And they all feared their women in one way- that she might be unfaithful to him. And this was and is the fear of God for our sin, our unfaithfulness. The Jews who first heard Hosea and others would've been led into taking sympathy with the man, agreeing that the punishment for the woman was appropriate to her sin (Jer. 2:30-37; 13:20-27). And yet of course the point was that it was they who were the woman in all this. We've all seen jealous men in relationships, querying every guy who calls their home number, wanting to know whom the wife's been out with... and on a far higher and altogether not petty level, this is the kind of God with whom we are in relationship. The men of Old Testament times feared their woman's unfaithfulness as it placed his whole honour and status as a man at stake. Hos. 2:7,12 reveals Hosea's hurt and anger that his wife considered other men to be the providers of her food and needs; for this was his honour, to provide for his wife, and for other men not to do that. And so we could say that in our unfaithfulness, in our turning to other supports other than Him... no less that God Himself is at stake. God is at stake. That's how he sees it. That's how much He's risked Himself for us, when He could have never even gotten involved with us. No less than God Himself is at stake. And perhaps I need to stop writing and you need to stop reading for a moment, to reflect on the tragedy of that.

Hos 2:8 *For she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal*- By allowing her lovers to provide her food and clothing, she was insulting her husband Hosea (Hos. 2:7); for these were the basic necessities which a husband provided for his wife. And as God does with us, Hosea gave Gomer far more than that- he multiplied silver and gold to her. The silver and gold were 'hers' in that they were the betrothal gifts demonstrating she was Hosea's. See on 2:13.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14).

At the time of this prophecy [under Jeroboam II and Uzziah], there was great prosperity in Israel. Amos prophesied at the same time, and has much to say about the prosperity of the nation and the related rampant materialism. This was all God's undeserved blessing- but the people liked to think this was due to their loyalty to the fertility cults of Baal. Gomer likewise presents as materialistic, sleeping with other men in the hope of material benefit. Perhaps she did because she was a cult prostitute.

Our lack of faith that God really will provide, our seeking of those things from others apart from Him, is a similar insult to Him at the most essential level of His being and our relationship. The parallel in the God / Israel relationship is clear. The Baal cult was a fertility cult. The idea was that by sleeping with the temple prostitutes, Baal would provide fertility in family life and also good harvests and fullness of bread. Yet Yahweh was the giver of bread to Israel (Ex. 16:29 cp. Dt. 8:18; Ps. 136:25; Ps. 146:7). For Israel to trust Baal for these things was a denial of Him.

Hosea did everything for this worthless woman. He gave her "corn, wine, oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they [her lovers] prepared for Baal". He was presumably a wealthy man, and yet gave it all to his wife, who in turn blew it all with her boyfriends on Baal worship. And once he gave it to her, he had given his all; I will suggest on Hos. 3:2 that afterwards he had little else to give her. It's like the billionaire marrying a worthless woman who manipulates him into giving her his money, which she blows down at the casino day by day, and sleeps with the guys she hangs out with down there. But "she did not know that I gave her..." all these things (2:8)- i.e. she didn't appreciate it one bit. And so Hosea decides that he will withdraw this generosity from her, and then, he surmises, "she shall say, I will go and return to my first husband" (2:7). This was Hosea's hope, and in his own mind, he put these words in her mouth. The hopefulness of Hosea was a reflection of the love he had for her. And all this speaks eloquently of the hopefulness of the Almighty Father who thought "surely they will reverence My Son" when He sends Him. And the purposeful anti-climax of the parable is that no, they don't and won't reverence His Son, and even worse, they kill Him.

Hos 2:9 *Therefore I will take back My grain in its time, and My new wine in its season, and will pluck away My wool and My linen which should have covered her nakedness-* It was a husband's duty to provide food and clothing for his wife. To "take [them] back" is therefore tantamount to a divorce. This is how Hosea and therefore God felt about Gomer / Israel. The historical fulfilment would have been in how droughts and famine plagued the Jews who returned from exile at the time of Haggai. Their apparent faithfulness to the covenant was hypocritical, and in their hearts they were still with their idols- which morphed from literal idols to the idols of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. We see here Hosea's anger as a reflection of God's. The wrath of God, His grief at sin and being rejected, is intertwined with His amazing grace and love. That the extent of God's anger arises from the degree of His love is perhaps reflected in the way the Hebrew words for "lover" and "hater" are so closely related- oheb and oyeb. The gravity and emotional enormity of each 'side' of the total equation, the huge tension of the equilibrium that keeps them in perfect balance in God's character and words, was reflected in the prophets personally; and it will be in us too. The result of this is that the anger of both God and His prophets becomes

understandable as more an expression of His and their sorrow, the hurtness of their love, even their weariness.

According to Ex. 21:10,11, a husband should provide for his wife food, clothing and sex. The ancient Near Eastern cultures generally felt that in the case of divorce, a husband could recover everything from his wife, on the basis that they had never become part of her property, as she had not been a faithful wife. This could be the idea behind the Hebrew here: "I will take back the grain to myself", along with "my grain... my must... my wool... my flax" [i.e. material for her clothes]. Gomer had taken these things from her lovers, and thus she declared herself not to be Hosea's wife. Israel had 'taken' these things from the Baal fertility cult, and thus declared themselves not to be Yahweh's wife. And if we trust in our own strength to provide these things- our jobs, salaries, investments, pensions, families- we are effectively denying our relationship with God. He has promised to provide the basics- and this we need to accept in faith.

The linen was to cover her nakedness. Uncovering "nakedness" is used in Gen. 9:22,23 as a euphemism for her genitals. This uncovering of her nakedness is parallel with exposing her lewdness (Hos. 2:10). This will be the shame of the rejected at the day of judgment; and it's why any personal game plan that depends upon looking good to our brethren when we're rotten in God's sight will end in the most acute shame ultimately. But the promises and prophecies and even fantasies of Israel's future glory always occur within a few verses of such outpourings of wrath. The prophets are full of this, and Hosea especially, following the feelings of Hosea toward Gomer.

Hos 2:10 *Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will deliver her out of My hand-* The idea is that she would be made naked. To strip a woman naked was the punishment for adultery. But this was to be done before or "in the sight of" the lovers, who represented Israel's idols. Idol worshippers made themselves naked before the idols (Ex. 32:25; and it is especially used of the idolatry at the time of Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28:19, in whose time Hosea prophesied, Hos. 1:1). So the punishment was in fact their sin. Sin is its own punishment. Sinners live out their own condemnation by what they do. "No one will deliver her..." refers to the "lovers". None of the idols in whom Israel trusted could deliver them from Yahweh's judgment and jealous wrath. Or "None shall deliver her" could suggest that previously God had not judged Israel fully for the sake of faithful ancestors like Abraham and David. We see that third parties can affect others' salvation as in Mk. 2:5, but only within limits. Those limits had now been exceeded.

Hos 2:11 *I will also cause all her celebrations to cease: her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies-* Hosea was prophesying in the context of the reforms of Jeroboam II, which had appeared on the surface to root out Baal worship- but in reality, the people remained deeply committed to it. All this was reflected in the surface level commitment of Gomer to him whilst committing adultery with multiple partners. God through Hosea said that He despised Gomer and Israel's keeping of the Sabbaths, sacrifices and solemn feasts. Gomer and Israel offered sacrifices with flocks and herds (Hos. 5:6). Gomer was an observant Jewess- all part of her deceptive life with Hosea. The feasts ["celebrations"] may refer to the extra feasts which the Jews inaugurated upon their return from Babylon (Zech. 7:5; 8:19). This apparent devotion to Yahweh when they were self-centred, materialistic and self-righteous were abhorrent to God, and the latter half of Isaiah's prophecies make the same point. They were matched by Gomer's apparent devotion to Hosea.

Hos 2:12 *I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, about which she has said, 'These are my wages that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest', and the animals of the field shall eat them-* Gomer received vines, fig trees and forests from her lovers. She even became “rich” because of this (Hos. 12:8). All of this was done whilst married to Hosea. His patience and love for her must have been amazing. And even that was and is a poor reflection of the depth of God’s love and grace for Israel, and for us too. It’s more than sobering, to be in a relationship where we are loved so much more deeply than we love back. It’s worrying and challenging, to the point that every fibre in our being should be crying out to love this wonderful God far, far more than we do. Gomer must have lied to Hosea *so* much. And Israel are criticized throughout his prophecy for just the same. “Ephraim compasses me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit... they have spoken lies” (Hos. 11:12; 7:13). In fact, the untruthfulness became compulsive and obsessive: “He daily increases lies” (Hos. 12:1). Gomer would’ve lied about where she was going, about how she spent Hosea’s money, about whose the children were... And the key proof of our spiritual sincerity is whether we are in the core of our beings truthful, both with our God and with ourselves.

Israel offered to the Baals, and claimed the Baals in return gave them their blessings. But in reality, the Baals only took- and gave nothing. Because their blessings were from Yahweh, by grace. So it is with all idolatry. Gomer likewise paid men to sleep with her, but liked to think that what Hosea had given her was in fact the payment from her lovers.

Presumably Gomer went to the idol shrines and was a prostitute. She describes the things she supposedly possessed in her own right as what she received from her lovers. And the idols of Israel are described by Hosea as their lovers, with whom they were unfaithful to Yahweh (Hos. 2:7-15; 8:9; 9:10). It all fits together. Gomer got pregnant with the idol worshippers, she was unfaithful to Hosea by sleeping with them, just as Israel were doing the same to Yahweh by worshipping those idols. No wonder Hosea came to know the heart of God through his experience with Gomer. He knew, it seems, ahead of time, that Gomer was a wife who was going to become adulterous.

Hos 2:13 *I will visit on her the days of the Baals, to which she burned incense, when she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and went after her lovers-* She wore a nose ring and pendant in order to ‘go after’ her lovers. And yet these things would’ve been understood as wedding gifts, akin to a woman today wearing a wedding ring. The awful thing is that she used the very things Hosea had given her as an expression of his unique commitment to her- as a means for adultery. Likewise the silver and gold of her dowry, she used in Baal worship (Hos. 2:8). She wasn’t doing it for money or because she was in need; the implication is that she was using the aphrodisiac to excite and sexually stimulate herself rather than her lovers, and was *therefore* going in search of them. We have to ask what wilful stimulations to sin, to unfaithfulness to our Master, we allow into our lives.

And forgot Me, says Yahweh- God’s lament through Hosea, “but me she forgot” is an insight into His broken heart. And how many hours of our days slip by with no conscious thought of Him... does He feel the same?

Hos 2:14 *Therefore behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness-* The allusion is to Israel redeemed from Egypt and allured into the wilderness (:15). It was there that Hosea intended to appeal to Gomer, just the two of them together far from anyone else. It was in the desert that God appealed to the redeemed Israel to

become His covenant people at Sinai. And it is after baptism that we are taken into the wilderness, and God sets up situations in our lives so that we are fundamentally alone with Him, away from our idols and other influences, in order that we might become solely His. Whether we are located within large families or congregations, this process will be discernible. There in those isolated situations, God wishes to speak tenderly, to our hearts.

"Allure" can as well mean "persuade". There was no deception implied, just a desperate attempt at persuasion. And here we have another insight into just how proactive God actually is. He again presents as desperate for relationship.

And speak tenderly to her- "Speak tenderly to her" is Heb. 'to her heart'. This is an idiom elsewhere used about seeking to win the heart of a woman by persuasive words (Gen. 34:3; Ruth 2:13; Jud. 19:3); Hosea dreamt of winning Gomer back to him by his words. This has a direct equivalent in the restoration context- for the same term is used in Is. 40:2, where God through the prophets seeks to speak to the heart of Zion and persuade her to return from Babylon to Him in Jerusalem and enjoy the married life of His Kingdom. And yet like Gomer, they either didn't want to hear, or responded on a merely surface level.

Hos 2:15 *I will give her vineyards from there-* From the desert, Israel entered immediately into the vineyard region of Israel. Hence "from there", the desert, was she to be given vineyards. And they would be "her vineyards", not "my vineyards", reflecting how we are genuinely given blessing from God which becomes legitimately ours. Hosea was perhaps wealthy, and had given Gomer vineyards as part of the marriage contract. Just as God gave the land and its fruitfulness to Israel. He bankrupted himself in his love for this woman, despite knowing her nature and history as a whore. It recalls the Father's love in giving all to the prodigal son, surely knowing his likely abuse of it all.

And the valley of Achor for a door of hope- The valley of Achor was the symbol of Israel's unfaithfulness to God and their punishment for coveting Babylonian idolatry. That exactly fits the context of the returned exiles, who brought Babylonian idolatry with them. See on :22. But the fantasy was that at the point of Israel's most shameful weakness, the point where they had been barred from entering the Kingdom because of Achan and his Babylonian idolatry- there all would be reversed, and that weakness and shame would in fact become a "door" into the Hope of Israel, the reestablished Kingdom of God. And so God uses the worst human failure, and attempts to make it a door of entrance to the sure Hope.

And she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt- Israel became God's covenant wife at Sinai. Just as Hosea fantasized about having a second marriage ceremony with Gomer, so God had the hope that Israel would again enter covenant with Him as they had done at Sinai. But they would not, and the new covenant is now sealed with every believing Christian heart.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos.

2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 2:16 *It will be in that day, says Yahweh, that you will call Me 'my husband', and no longer call Me 'my master'*- "My master / owner / possessor", or, 'Baal'. Gomer called Yahweh 'Baal'- in other words, she thought that by worshipping Baal she was in fact worshipping Yahweh. This was how Israel justified their Baal worship, reasoning that actually they had never left Yahweh, they still kept His feasts and sacrifices, but they worshipped Him through their Baal worship. This implies that Israel even called Yahweh "my Baal". And so when Gomer participated in these fertility rituals, she was living out the very picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to their God. Indeed, Gomer may have been a cult prostitute. There is strong archaeological evidence for the worship of Yahweh as Baal, just as today we can seek to worship God through materialism and modern idolatry. The tendency to mix Yahweh worship with Baal worship was very strong, and is the abiding essential temptation to all God's people. The inscriptions show that the Israelites liked to believe that Yahweh had a consort, Asherah, and worship of the asherah was therefore Yahweh worship. "The inscriptions recount a blessing on different individuals "by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah". Moreover, from a pillar in a burial tomb near Khirbet el-Qom is an inscription, "May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh, my guardian and his Asherah". All this was reflected in how Gomer had professed genuine loyalty to Hosea whilst enjoying being a cult prostitute.

In Hos. 2:16-23 we appear to have a fantasy of Hosea about his family. After nostalgic dreaming about the early days of their relationship, Hosea fantasizes about once again wooing Gomer, becoming betrothed to her, marrying her in some sort of outdoors wedding ceremony in which the animals and physical creation witness the vows and enter the joy, entering a new covenant with her, and renaming their children from 'Not my people' to 'My people'. As the children were to be renamed, Lo-ammi becoming Ammi, so the valley of Achor would become a door of hope (Hos. 2:15), and Jezreel, scene of Israel's rebellions, would become the place of joyful reconciliation between God and His people. The valley of Achor had previously been a block to Israel's entry to the land; now it becomes the entrance to it. In that awful place, God wanted to stage an outdoor wedding ceremony with His re-married people. Is. 65:10 mentions Achor as a place of special blessing in the Kingdom of God on earth- it's as if God's grace rejoices in inverting things, pouring out His richest blessing upon the places of our darkest failures. And we in daily life, in the interactions we have with others, are asked to reflect this same kind of grace.

This fantasy was and is the fantasy of God for His people. For doesn't love involve an element of fantasy, imagination, wild hope? If God loves His people with passion, is it so inappropriate that He should have such fantasy about them? And this God is our God! Although He may appear silent, our response to the new covenant must give Him great joy, although this doesn't cancel out the sorrow and tragedy of all His other rejected love. It makes me for one want to preach the harder to persuade men and women of His love. Let's remember that the events in Hosea's life, according to the information in Hos. 1:1, occurred over a span of at least 30, and perhaps even 50 years. His love for Gomer was the love of a lifetime, the hope and pain of a lifetime. And this in its turn reflects the long term love of the eternal God for His people. Hosea's fantasy for Gomer was unbounded. He fantasized of how when

she returned to him with all her heart, with the children renamed, actually the whole of creation would join with him and her in some sort of ceremony of renewal (Hos. 2:16-23). The heavens would echo back the earth's joy. The wonderful thing is that this will happen when finally the Lord Jesus returns and Israel returns to their God. His fantasy was also God's. And God's fantasy for His people will in the end come true. And yet the whole language of Israel's rejection and then a *new* covenant being made between God and her is in essence marriage language.

Hos 2:17 *For I will take away the names of the Baals out of her mouth, and they will no longer be mentioned by name-* The Baals of our day are sin in all forms; and such things are "not to be named amongst us" now (Eph. 5:3). God here promises to stop Israel serving Baal. This suggests a psychological miracle- the work of the Spirit directly on human hearts, and the new covenant we too are in promises the same- the gift of a new heart and spirit, and a desire for God in truth. "Take away" is the same Hebrew word in :2 where Israel are asked to "put away" their adulteries. Their adultery was with the Baals. And now God says that He will even do this for them, such is His desire to have them. This is the power of the Spirit in the new covenant.

The plural "Baals" is repeated elsewhere in Hosea. Israel weren't going after just one other god. There were various Baals, just as Gomer had many lovers rather than just one lover with whom she had an affair. Her sexual addiction therefore represents Israel's psychological obsession with having many gods. That there is only one true God was accepted in theory by them- only as much as Gomer claimed to be the wife of only one man. We see here how hard it was to believe in just one God, and that difficulty is perhaps reflected to this day in how man wishes to turn the one true God into a trinity.

Hos 2:18 *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the animals of the field, and with the birds of the sky, and with the creeping things of the ground. I will break the bow, the sword, and the battle out of the land, and will make them lie down safely-* This covenant with the animals recalls the covenant in Eden and also with the earth / *eretz* after the flood. Judgment would come, but the faithful Israel were to have part in a wider covenant with all creation, looking forward to the restoration of their Kingdom being the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth under Messiah. Dwelling safely without war and in harmony with the natural creation, who would also be blessed, is also the language of the blessings for obedience to the old covenant detailed in Lev. 26 and Dt. 28. I suggested on :17 that God's intention was to make them obedient, to make them blessed, to take away sin from them. All that is within us cries out that they themselves had to be obedient, and then get the blessings. But God's love goes even beyond that; measure for measure and crime and punishment is all subsumed beneath the power of His saving grace.

God wanted to make a new covenant with them, and this involved a new creation- hence the allusions to the Genesis creation here. The animals here are mentioned in the order of their creation in Gen. 1. As Hosea loved Gomer but so wished she would be different in some ways, so God was and is prepared to re-create His beloved- if they are willing. All they have to do is say yes. His Spirit will do the rest. Animals, birds, creeping things all repeats the order of the creation found in Gen. 1:30 "To

every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth". God had in view a new creation to go along with His redeemed, permanently faithful people; after the uncreation discussed on Hos. 4:3. And this is a theme of the new covenant. The new covenant offered to Gomer and to Israel, seeing they had broken the first one, broken it in the sense of rendering it broken in pieces, is the new covenant we have accepted. We memorialize it in the cup of the new covenant. And we have accepted it because Israel, as Gomer, refused it.

Hos 2:19 *I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion-* On the level of Hosea and Gomer, this reflects Hosea's fantasy of remarrying Gomer, starting over, with him reflecting all the characteristics of God's Name which are declared here. On the higher level of God and Israel, it speaks of the articulation of God's deepest character in bringing Israel again into covenant with Him. The penalty for adultery was death under the old covenant. So we have here implied a new covenant, of grace, and yet within that grace, there was "justice". This is exactly the theme of Paul in Romans 1-8. Israel were about to be destroyed as they had been unfaithful to the covenant; but Yahweh is offering them a new covenant, and the new covenant is an eternal covenant- 'betrothal forever'. The reference to blessing like "the sand of the sea" in Hos. 1:10 alludes both to the promises to Abraham [which were the basis of the new covenant] and to common marriage blessings. The wife was wished fertility like the sand of the sea. So it is the new covenant which is offered to Israel- which Paul says is based on the promises to Abraham rather than the law given on Sinai.

But we must note that the idea of remarrying a once unfaithful wife is a direct allusion to Dt. 24:4: "Her former husband who sent her away may not take her again to be his wife after she is defiled, for that is abomination before Yahweh". Grace was overriding law. Both Yahweh and Hosea were doing, or offering to do, what was abomination to them and what would make them a laughing stock amongst men. Just as Hosea was asked to marry a whore instead of stoning her to death.

Hos 2:20 *I will even betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh-* The faithfulness of God is here emphasized apart from the other characteristics which comprise His Name (:19). Gomer had been unfaithful, and yet Hosea, reflecting God's feelings toward Israel, assured her of his utter faithfulness. "You shall know Yahweh" uses 'knowing' in the Hebraic sense of relationship. Through experiencing His utter grace toward their unfaithfulness, they would know Him. And this is the amazing paradox which continues to this day; through serious failure we come to know Him in spirit and truth. And that knowledge is quite separate to the academic, theological truth which is thought by many to be so important- until they face up to their own sins and the wonder of God's grace. The Hebrew idea of "faithfulness" is that of truth; the deepest truth is not a set of theological propositions, however accurate and faithful to the Biblical text; but rather the experience of God's eternal faithfulness to His covenant to us, and His immense desire to make the relationship work.

The idea was that as the ten tribes were about to go into captivity, Yahweh through Hosea was desperately offering them the chance to remarry Him and enter the new covenant. But they refused, as did Gomer to Hosea.

Hos 2:21 *It will happen in that day, I will respond, says Yahweh, I will respond to the heavens, and they will echo down to the earth-* I suggested on :16 that Hosea has been

fantasizing about an outdoor remarriage ceremony with Gomer in which even the natural creation gets involved, but the emphasis is now upon God. He will "respond" to the marriage vows with a voice so mighty that it reaches from earth to heaven, and echoes back to earth. That was how Hosea felt he would cry out in response to the "I do!" of a marriage covenant. And this is the force of God's word to us- it is a powerful voice, louder than that heard at Sinai, which endlessly assures us of His "I do!" toward us. God places Himself at this point as if on earth; for His voice uttered on earth ascends even to Heaven and then echoes back to earth. This is how closely identified God is with us. The whole idea of course recalls the Sinai covenant, but as we read in Heb. 12, the new covenant involves a voice more powerful even than that. "Respond" is the same word used in Ex. 19:8,19 of how God "answered" the people and they "answered" to Him. Heb. 12 interprets the voice associated with the new covenant with the word made flesh in the blood of God's Son.

Hos 2:22 *And the earth will respond to the grain, and the new wine, and the oil-*

These were the very things mentioned in :8 "she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil". They were the things guaranteed to a wife by a husband. Hosea had provided them for Gomer but she had spurned them and sought them from her lovers. But now Hosea fantasizes about a remarriage, and again giving these things to Gomer; she represents Israel, referred to as the earth or land because as explained on Hos. 1:2, the land was seen as the recipient of the blessings of either Yahweh or Baal. So at the time when Israel were to go to their destruction, God through Hosea is appealing for them to enter a new covenant with Him, as Hosea offered Gomer a remarriage and a new covenant and marriage ceremony.

Corn, new wine and oil are the three things consistently associated with blessings for obedience to the old covenant (Dt. 7:13; 11:14; 28:51; 33:28). But these blessings are brought upon Israel simply in response to the returned echo of God's great cry of solemn fidelity to Israel. "The earth", the *eretz* promised to Abraham, often stands for the people of that land, God's covenant people. They will respond to the echo of God's word of covenant fidelity, His "I do!" toward Israel (see on :21). And this was Hosea's hope, that Gomer would respond to His gracious offer of remarriage to her, and the blessings he would give her despite her unfaithfulness.

And they will respond to Jezreel- Jezreel, the scene of Israel's judgment by her Divinely sent invaders, would be the scene of blessings for obedience, just because God wanted to give those blessings. In the same way, the valley of Achor, scene of Israel's apostasy and preference for Babylon over Canaan, was to be transformed into a door of hope; see on :15.

Hos 2:23 *I will sow her to Me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy-* "Jezreel" means 'the sowing of Yah'. Sowing implies fruit, spiritual fruit; and the return of the exiles to their land was intended to be the basis of their spiritual fruit, filling the face of the earth with it (Is. 27:6). But this sowing in the earth by Yahweh, 'Jezreel', was to arise out of their judgment at Jezreel. And so out of judgment for sin comes spiritual fruit. That was God's intention, just as Hosea's intended outcome from the open air remarriage ceremony he envisaged was "fruit", children by Gomer, rather than the children she had had by her adulterous liaisons. But this intention didn't work out for Hosea, and it only did for God by redefining "Israel", as Paul explains in Romans.

The intention was that Israel and Judah would return from captivity and be sown in the land ["earth"], and produce fruit. This is an image of the restoration also found in Jeremiah. God's plan and passion for the restoration was reflected in Hosea's fantasy about Gomer's return to him with all her heart.

And I will tell those who were not My people, 'You are My people;' and they will say, 'You are my God!' - Through it all, Hosea was hopeful. He looked and hoped for a day when he could say to Gomer's children: "You are my people". If Gomer came back to him truly, then he longed to call those children of adultery his very own children. The allusion here is again to wedding vows; as the woman accepted her husband as her lord, so Israel were to accept God as their God; and "You are my wife" became for God "You are My people". This was God's intention for Israel as it was Hosea's for Gomer, but the tragedy is that such love, such huge heart for the beloved, was not appreciated nor ultimately accepted. It is for us, to whom God has now turned, to resolutely vow to do all we can to respond to it and be His faithful woman to the end.

HOSEA CHAPTER 3

Hos 3:1 *Yahweh said to me, Go again*- This could refer to God's relationship with Judah. But I take this to mean that God was telling Hosea to as it were re-marry Gomer, to try to start the marital relationship over again, just as some couples desire to have a 're-marriage' after a period of difficulty between them. Notice how Hosea was commanded to "love" her. We may think that love is something spontaneous, that can't be 'commanded'. But the essence of love, even the love that binds a marriage together, is the love that is an act of the will rather than pure emotion. Hosea's offer to Gomer to start over and as it were re-marry was made when she was "yet an adulteress". He didn't say 'If you stop whoring around, then we can maybe have some sort of re-marriage'. His very offer of the re-marriage was made whilst she was still doing it, such was his love and hope for her, according to the principle that the grace of God leads to repentance. And God does the very same with us, day by day, if only we will perceive it. He reveals His amazing love and grace when we are furthest from Him, in order to bring us back to Him. And this must set the pattern for the way in which we deal with those who sin against us, in things great or small, in family life, in church life, in the workplace...

Note that when God tells Hosea to "go again" and marry this woman, He uses 'Yahweh' about Himself, rather than speaking in the first person: "Go yet, love a woman... according to the love of Yahweh toward the children of Israel" (Hos. 3:1). Perhaps this was in order to demonstrate the grace and passionate love so inherent within God's very Name.

"Again" translates a Hebrew word elsewhere translated "all life long" (Gen. 48:15 "the God who fed me all my life long"), and can carry the idea of 'keep on repeatedly'. We noted on Hos. 1:1 that Hosea was married to Gomer over a long life time. His love for her "all life long", "again and again" forgiving and hoping for her to respond to his love... was reflective of God's amazing, abiding and enduring love for His people. The same word is used of how Yahweh and Hosea felt that "I will no more [not continually] have mercy" upon Gomer / Israel. But now they both vow to "more", more and more, again and again, love and have mercy on her.

Hos. 2 has offered Gomer / Israel a remarriage under a new covenant. One option worth considering is that Hos. 3 describes what happened, as Hosea forced this through- despite Gomer not really wanting it. Just as God did with His people.

Love a woman loved by another, and an adulteress, even as Yahweh loves the children of Israel- It's hard to understand what was happening in Hos. 3:1- it appears Hosea attempted to force through to realization his fantasy about re-marrying Gomer and starting over, and so he redeemed her again to himself for marriage. But still she went astray from him. Another suggestion is that Hos. 3:1 actually speaks of a second wife, who according to the analogy of Ez. 23, might have represented Judah. In this case we see the extreme love of Hosea, and God; having gone through all that heart break over Gomer, he was still so full of love that he was prepared to risk all yet again in another relationship. The reference to "Israel" rather than "Judah" could be problematic for this interpretation, but it was always God's intention that the community restored from Babylon would include both Judah and Israel.

Here for all time we see "love" portrayed as an act of the will and not the mere emotion of in-loveness. Hosea was commanded to go and love a woman, despite his deeply painful disappointment with Gomer. This challenge of "love" remains, no matter how we interpret the woman in view- as a second woman, or again Gomer. We note the contrast with Hos. 1:2: "Go and take a woman" now becomes "go again and love a woman". Hosea was being led further in his own understanding of love. We also see reflected here how God loves people as they are, not because of their loveliness or love worthiness. But, as with Hosea, in hope, desperate hope, that they will respond to that love and be transformed towards Him.

"I know Ephraim" (Hos. 5:3), but Ephraim wouldn't know Yahweh, "they do not know Yahweh" (Hos. 5:4). It's just as Hosea was told to love a woman who was in love with another man (Hos. 3:1,2). God loved them, He wanted to know them, to experience intimate relationship- but they looked elsewhere for love and intimacy, just as Gomer did.

Though they turn to other gods- This is the amazing thing. As Hosea was eager to push through his fantasy of remarriage with Gomer even though she was impenitent, so God too had the same kind of love. Even though Israel were worshipping other gods, He wanted them to re-enter covenant with Him. Repentance and moral purity are of course critical to the human response to God. But His grace is such that He wishes to save His people and have relationship with them even whilst they are yet in their sins. This is the powerful lesson we take away from Hosea. Many troubled marriages feature an affair and then an agreement to start over- and yet the adulterer is still continuing their liaisons even then. Truly God's love for Israel enables Him to enter into human situations so completely. The allusion is to "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3). This was at the very core foundation of the covenant. The same term "look / turn to other gods" is used frequently in the law. To do so was to break the covenant: "They will turn unto other gods... and provoke Me and break My covenant" (Dt. 31:20). Yahweh and Hosea made the choice to love a woman / people who provoked Him, and who were breaking the marriage covenant even at the point of betrothal. Just as Hosea had been commanded to marry a prostitute. To love one who provokes you... again shows that "love" is an absolute act of the will.

And love cakes of raisins- This reflects Israel's mixture of Yahweh worship with Baal worship. According to 2 Sam. 6:19 ("He distributed to all the people, even throughout the whole multitude of Israel, both to men and women, to each one a

portion of bread, dates and raisins"), these cakes appear to have been part of the legitimate worship of Yahweh- and yet in Song 2:5 ("Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am faint with love") they are referred to as an aphrodisiac. There was a heady mix of Yahweh worship with participation in the sexual rituals of the Baal cult. It was this mixture which was so abhorrent to God- and time and again, in essence, we likewise mix flesh and spirit. A brother may express the most awful hatred and spite in 'upholding the faith' against one whom he perceives as apostate- and thus show the same mixture of flesh and spirit. A sister may indulge in gossip, kidding herself it's all for the cause of Christian love and concern... and the examples multiply, hour by hour, in daily Christian experience. We see it again in Hos. 3:4. The word for "cakes" refers to the *dibla*, the raisin cakes used in the Baal cult, from which the word Diblaim comes, the father of Gomer. Hosea knowingly married a temple prostitute, just as God married Israel, in the hope that their intense love and covenant relationship would reform her and make her responsive to their love.

Raisin cakes can be understood also as simply delicacies. And so many commit prostitution against the Lord for the sake of seeking the luxury life now. We must note the contrast between the "love of Yahweh" and the way the object of that love was loving materialism and idols. Loving someone who loves someone else, who doesn't respond to your love... is love. This is God's love to us, to Israel, to the world. And we are asked to reflect that love, as Hosea was.

Hos 3:2 *So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley-* The way Hosea redeems his wife, partly in cash and partly in kind, suggests he now wasn't wealthy. He had given her all his wealth (see on Hos. 2:8,9). Now he gave absolutely all he could scrape together for that worthless woman. And this was the cost to God, even His feelings, in redeeming His people- ultimately, through the blood of His own Son. And think of how Hosea accepts the children Gomer produced as his children- when they were the children of her whoredom. But it's also possible to argue that he redeemed her for the proposed second marriage from one of her lovers. But the price asked was very low, half the price of a slave (30 pieces of silver, Ex. 21:32), and he made up the rest with barley- the feed of animals, the cheapest grain. Or threw in just a bit extra. This could indeed reflect his poverty, having like God given his all for this worthless woman. Or it could be that she was now reduced to a sex slave, and not a very valuable one at that, worth only half the stipulated price for a slave, with some barley thrown in on top. Judah were redeemed from servitude in Babylon, and were weak, unattractive servants anyway. But it was God's intention, and potentially possible, for them to remarry Him and re-establish Israel's Kingdom, filling the face of the earth with the resultant fruit of that grace (Is. 27:6).

It has been suggested that "a homer and a half of barley" means '15 shekels of silver paid in barley'. This plus 15 shekels of silver would total 30 shekels, the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). In this case, the woman to be loved, redeemed and married would be a slave. Hosea was prophesying as Israel were about to go into captivity in Assyria, and as Isaiah was threatening Judah with captivity in Babylon. The idea would then be that Hosea's desperate love for this unworthy woman / wife, giving all he had left, spoke of God's extreme love and grace in redeeming His people from the slavery of captivity. He bankrupted Himself... the God of the universe. Just as God as it were "died" in Israel's death. "A half-homer" is LXX "a bottle of wine". This would again speak of how hard pushed Hosea was to raise the price. And it would speak of

our redemption through the wine / blood of the new covenant. For Hosea was offering her a new covenant, seeing she had broken the old marriage covenant.

"For fifteen pieces of silver" is the numerical equivalent of "Nissan". This was the day after Passover when Israel were redeemed from Egypt.

Hos 3:3 *I said to her, You shall stay with me many days. You shall not play the prostitute, and you shall not be with any other man. I will also be so toward you-* The allusion is clearly to "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3). After the second marriage, Hosea's idea was that they would both abstain from sexual relationships for a period. She was not to be a prostitute, nor [additionally] have relationships with men. He too would be focused solely upon her despite their lack of intimate relationship. But Gomer was still unfaithful. This period may speak of the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, where Judah were still God's people, but there was a period of abstaining from intimate relationship whilst they repented and reflected. But God's total focus was to be upon them, just as it is upon us. This amazing and unique, exclusive focus of God, king of the cosmos, upon a few mixed up people on this tiny planet... is love and grace indeed.

The idea is that Hosea purchased this woman to be his wife- but then she has to enter a period of isolation, to reflect on her sins and demonstrate her commitment and response to her redemption. And then the marriage can begin (:5). This in a way is what we are going through, redeemed but still in some kind of isolation from our redeemer, until the marriage begins at the Lord's return. In the context of Judah, this 'sitting down' in this strange isolation (:4) would refer to Judah's sitting down in exile in Babylon (Lam. 1:1; 2:10; Ps. 137:1). "You shall..." isn't so much prediction as command. But Judah and Israel went into captivity "many days" (:4) without the temple and with no king- but they didn't become faithful to Yahweh, they were not purged from their idolatry. Indeed they assimilated with the pagan world of their captors. Likewise, Hosea's plan for Gomer just didn't work either. Even God's choosing of the Gentiles as a faithful bride... didn't work much better. For Paul in Romans, Hebrews and 1 Corinthians is clear that the Gentile bride is not necessarily much better than the Israelite one had been. To the point that we cannot say "We are better than them". The church too were presented as a chaste virgin to the Lord, but prostituted themselves. To the point that some interpretations conclude that the whore of Revelation is both Israel / Jerusalem, and the prostituted, unfaithful church / Zion. Or we could say that the defiled bride of Christ is presented in terms of unfaithful Israel- a whore. It's not that God as it were struck lucky in His second marriage. You only have to enquire how many Christian converts remain faithful to the end of their days... You only have to think back over all those you know who were once baptized into the Lord, who were His betrothed virgin, who are now long gone back into the world. The ministry of the prophets to Israel, Paul and Peter's desperate appeals to the corrupted church, our appeals... don't work, at least not on any mass level. Only a few respond, a remnant of the remnant. Just as Gomer never really repented and returned.

We see here the simple fact that we are to be only for God, and He is also only for us. He has no other people out there somewhere. We are uniquely His. That the King of the cosmos should have nobody else but us... in infinite space... is a marvel. If we go wrong or are unfaithful to Him, He has nobody else. This is why He is so passionate about our response to Him.

Hos 3:4 *For the children of Israel shall live many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice-* I suggested on :3 that the "many days" may refer to the

70 years of captivity. They had no princes, for they were slain and the line of Zedekiah brought to an end (Ez. 21:25-27); and they could not offer sacrifice as the temple was in ruins. "Live" is the usual word for 'sitting down', referring to Judah's sitting down in exile in Babylon (Lam. 1:1; 2:10; Ps. 137:1). However this didn't really work, as they became pagan in Babylon and most didn't want to return to the land and they rejected the new covenant offered (:5). Likewise Hosea's second woman it seems rejected this plan.

"Sacrifice" is LXX "altar". These are the pagan altars and pillars of Hos. 10:1, which Israel made in order to get fertility blessings from Baal. But this is a command, a hope, rather than a prediction. Because in captivity, both Judah and Israel still worshipped local pagan deities. LXX "Without a sacrifice, without an altar, without a priesthood, and without oracles", i.e. the urim and thummim. This clearly describes how Israel and Judah would be in captivity, but the plan still didn't work. For they turned to the idols of their captors.

"King and princes" are seen as responsible for the state of Judah's downfall. God laments that He has given them a king and princes (Hos. 13:10); they were addicted to alcohol (Hos. 7:3). And so Yahweh says they are to abide many days without a king and princes, so that they might learn faithfulness to Him (Hos. 3:4). He gave them a king and princes, knowing what this would lead to. Unfaithfulness to Him. But we see here how in the end, God gives man what he wants, as He did to the prodigal son. The issue is desiring the right things- His Kingdom and His righteousness.

And without sacred stone, and without ephod or idols- As noted on :1, the people were using "cult pillars... ephods" in their Baal worship. The patriarchs set up pillars in faith; and an ephod was part of Yahweh worship. But yet again, the same external things were used in a wrong context with wrong motives. Excavations of the Elephantine community reveal that the Jews mixed Yahweh and Baal worship to such an extent that they believed that Yahweh, like Baal, had a consort called Anat. Inscriptions from Quntillet Ajrud show the names Yahweh and Baal mixed together, including one which appears to speak of "Yahweh and his asherah". Ez. 16:21 and Ez. 23:39 are quite specific about this anyway- Israel offered sacrifice to idols in Yahweh's own temple. The lack of ephod may mean that Yahweh would not be in communication with them, just as Hosea was going to leave Gomer in silence but within His care, in order to reflect upon herself and her relationship with Him. We recall that Gideon's ephod became an idol for Israel, and they prostituted themselves to it. It could be that Yahweh's ephod had been turned into a pagan object, whereby Israel thought they could worship Yahweh through worshipping idols. And this is the age old temptation for God's people.

Hos 3:5 *Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days-* This "return" referred initially to the potential for "Israel", Judah and the remnant of the ten tribes, to together return from captivity and re-establish God's Kingdom in Israel under a Messianic king in the line of David, trembling in repentance, and receiving Divine blessings. See on :3,4. It reflected Hosea's plan that his lavishing of grace upon Gomer would lead her to return to him. But this didn't happen as intended. God has set objectives in history, but He doesn't force their fulfilment. Finally all this shall come true, in the coming of a new Israel to Zion in repentance and acceptance of the Lord Jesus, the Messianic seed of David- "in the last days".

Yahweh's hope was that His people would finally "seek Yahweh their God" with "trembling" (Hos. 3:5). This was Hosea's fantasy for Gomer; as in Hos. 2:7, his hope was that Gomer would "seek" her lovers and not find them, and return to him. This was God's hope for Israel too; "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15). But they didn't. But it can happen- people "seek" the wrong things and give up, and then "seek" Yahweh. But sadly, most people, like Gomer, like Israel, waste their lives "seeking" the end of a rainbow and never get there.

"David their king" is the language of the Messianic ruler in the line of David who could have arisen had Judah really returned from exile, both to their God and to their land (Jer. 30:9; 33:15-21; Ez. 37:24-26). The hope was that the great effort to redeem Judah, as shown by Hosea loving his second unfaithful wife and giving all he had for her, would elicit a "return" to God and His land. But it didn't, overall. All so tragic.

For those who really 'got it', the marvel of God's grace would lead them to come trembling to Him (Hos. 3:5). He has this hope in view also in Hos. 11:11 "They shall come trembling out of Egypt". Jer. 33:9 hopes that at the restoration, they "shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to [Zion]". The awesome grace would make men tremble as they accepted it, and so it should be with us. Likewise Is. 60:5 "Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill [s.w. "tremble"] and be enlarged". Then we will have the opening of mind to perceive how great is His grace, something which we sense but only see from far in this life. Truly "I see from far / They beautiful light". But we will only appreciate that grace to the extent of trembling, if we first accept our deep guilt and whoredom against the God of all grace and love.

HOSEA CHAPTER 4

Hos 4:1 *Hear the word of Yahweh, you children of Israel; for Yahweh has a charge against the inhabitants of the land-* Hosea 4 described a "charge" or law suit (Hos. 4:1 Heb.) between God and the inhabitants of the land- and it's over lack of integrity, mercy and knowledge of God. This parallels Hosea's projected divorce with Gomer. Verse 4 and Hos. 5:1 continues the legal language. These things are paralleled in the law suit with murder, stealing and adultery- things which most people would shrug at are considered by Him to be criminal matters. At the end of chapter 3 we find God hopeful that His relationship with Israel might be re-established at the return from exile. But here, the tone changes. However it could be that we have here a prophecy from earlier in Hosea's ministry, where he explains why Israel is to be judged.

Indeed there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land- These are the very things we have read of in Hos. 2. As noted on Hos. 2:20, the knowledge of God meant relationship with Him, based upon repentance and being given God's grace. This was the ultimate "truth". Israel didn't want this, and yet God wanted to give it to them anyway, just as Hosea so loved Gomer that he wanted by all means to force through the restored relationship with her, just as God wanted the restored community of exiles to be His. The lack of truth reflects Gomer's deep dishonesty with Hosea; the "lying" (deceit) of :2. The key to understanding Hosea 4-14 is perceiving that God's feelings are reflected in Hosea's towards Gomer due to the situation in Hos. 1-3. We have a unique window onto the feelings of Yahweh Himself towards His people.

Hos 4:2 *There is cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break boundaries, and bloodshed causes bloodshed-* There is a downward spiral in sin, both on an individual and communal level. It is evident on the communal level, where "bloodshed causes bloodshed". "Break boundaries" translates a word meaning literally "to increase". It is used in :10; they had thought that they had increased, but all such human gain is in fact not any gain, and this is even perceived by those who so seek it.

The allusion in Hos. 4:2; 6:9; 7:1,4 is clearly to breaking of the ten commandments. These formed the basis of the old covenant. They had broken that covenant by doing these things, just as Gomer had. But the point was that a new covenant was being proposed to Gomer / Israel, seeing they had broken the old covenant- not simply in the sense of disobeying its terms, but thereby they had broken that covenant. It was no more. Just as Gomer's adultery had broken the marriage.

Hos 4:3 *Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells therein will waste away. All living things in her, even the animals of the field and the birds of the sky; yes, the fish of the sea also die-* This repeats the language of other prophets, especially Isaiah, about the calamity to befall Judah in order to appeal for her repentance (Is. 19:5,8; 24:4; Joel 1:10,12). The words and language is so similar. But famine and drought were God's way of not simply punishing His people for their sins, but appealing for their repentance; just as Hosea in Hos. 2 had thought of punishing Gomer so that she repented. And there was, as always, collateral damage due to sin; the physical creation would suffer. For "the land" is here paralleled with God's people upon it. The 'mourning' of the land was a hint at God's hope that they would mourn in repentance, just as Hosea hoped of Gomer.

We are reading here of a de-creation, alluding clearly to the order in Gen. 1:30: "To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky". The order of creation was fish, birds, beasts of the field and people- but that is reversed here. Yet this was in order for a new creation when Gomer / Israel entered the new covenant offered to them, as discussed on Hos. 2:18.

Hos 4:4 *Yet let no man bring a case, neither let any man accuse; for Your people are like those who bring charges against a priest-* As noted on :1, God has brought a legal case against Israel. But the tendency of Israel was to argue back against God, as the returned exiles did: "Wherein have we despised Your Name... polluted You?" (Mal. 1:6,7). The parallel was in Gomer insisting to Hosea that she'd done nothing wrong. And actually he was the one at fault. Bringing charges against a priest is an allusion to Dt. 17:12, where the sin of presumption is defined as arguing back against the judgment of God's priest. To argue back against God's judgments was effectively to put God in the dock and condemn Him. Paul uses exactly this concept in Romans, perhaps picked up from Hosea 4, in saying that if we seek to justify ourselves when in court with God, we are putting God in the dock; see on Rom. 3:4 ["let God be found true, but every man a liar. As it is written: You must be justified in Your words and must prevail when You come before judgment"]. Hosea wished his audience to accept that they had sinned and were in the dock before God; to not accept this was the sin of presumption. And doubtless he had lived all this out in discussions with Gomer, who endlessly justified her conscienceless behaviour. And this is what we are doing if we refuse to recognize our sin, or shrug it off with excuses.

Hos 4:5 *You will stumble in the day, and the prophet will also stumble with you in the*

night- This stumbling spoke of what was to happen at the invasions of Assyria and Babylon (Is. 8:15); but they had spiritually "stumbled in [lack of] justice" (Is. 28:7), and so their judgment was but a living out of their own attitudes and behaviour. Sin is its own judgment, and in that sense "we make the answer now", constantly standing before the judgment throne of God in daily life. Stumbling at noonday was what the returned exiles did (Is. 59:10) because they "had no eyes", no spiritual vision. The prophet who also stumbles with them could refer to false prophets. But as Hosea spoke these words to his audiences in Israel and Judah, he was "the prophet". He is thereby professing his unity with them, just as both God and himself were united with their unfaithful wives even in their fall. Such was their love.

Stumbling is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:37). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

And I will destroy your mother- This initially reflects Hosea's anger with Gomer's children, whom she had apparently born to him, when they were the children conceived in her adultery. Hosea had thoughts of deep anger against Gomer, telling her / his children that he would "destroy" their mother. Just as in Hos. 2 Hosea angrily says he will strip Gomer naked and kill her in the wilderness. But then his passionate love for her gets the better of him; and this all reflected the feelings of God for Israel, and His feelings for us who are sinners and unfaithful to the covenant. Jerusalem was seen as "the mother" (Gal. 4:26), so the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem may specifically be in view.

"I will destroy..." is perhaps clarified by :6; the people had destroyed themselves by refusing knowledge / intimacy / relationship with God.

Hos 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge-* Although God has just threatened to "destroy your mother" (:5), this was a reflection of how they had destroyed themselves (Hos. 13:9) through "lack of knowledge". The "knowledge" in view is not academic, theological propositions. Genuine intellectual failure is not a reason for the wrath of God, nor of any reasonable person against another who simply fails to understand. "Knowledge" is being used in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing', having a relationship. Just as Gomer rejected intimacy of relationship with Hosea, "knowledge" in the relational sense.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8 " she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal"; 5:4; 11:3 "I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that it was I who healed them"). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14).

Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you- As noted above, this doesn't mean punishment for intellectual failure. One doesn't get angry with a child who adds up a sum in math and comes to a wrong answer. "Knowledge" is being used in the Hebraic sense, of relationship. And again, God's judgment upon His people is only reflective of the position they had adopted themselves. They rejected intimate relationship with Him, and so the relationship was over. And it was therefore axiomatic that He also rejected them.

That you may be no priest to Me- It was God's intention that not just the Levites but all Israel should be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6), mediating relationship ("knowledge") of Him to the surrounding Gentile world. But instead they committed

spiritual adultery with them. So they precluded their own potential, as being a priest to the world. Just as we do, if we become indistinguishable from the world. The word must become flesh in us as it was in the Lord, like Him we are to live amongst them that we may be the light of the world, but if we become as them then we can no longer be their light.

"No priest" means they were no longer His people, which meant being a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6 "If you will indeed obey My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be ... to Me a kingdom of priests"). Being a nation of priests was conditional upon their obedience. Although disobedient, God had still counted them as His priests, just as Hosea had married a prostitute, in the hope that they would live as He considered them. But this failed, and so they are stripped of that title and role.

Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children- Mal. 2:7 clearly applies Hosea's argument in this verse to the returned exiles: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth". As noted on Hos. 1:1, Hosea prophesied over a long time in various contexts, to both Israel and Judah. What was true of God's people at the time of the prophecy before the exile was sadly true of them once they returned from it; in essence they repeated the same failures which had led to their exile. "I will also forget your children" again has a basis in Hosea's momentary feelings about Gomer's children, whom she claimed were his when he knew they were hers by reason of her adultery. The law of Israel's God was their covenant with Him; they had forgotten that covenant and committed adultery with the Gentiles, just as Gomer had forgotten her marriage covenant with Hosea and had children by her lovers. But although that was how Hosea felt, it was not how he finally was with Gomer. And God likewise; He would never forget Zion's children, although He felt like doing so and disowning them completely. The "hope of Israel" speaks partly of the hope Israel have of final restoration to God, despite being so hopelessly separated from Him by their unfaithfulness. This is indeed a blessed hope, and the fact Israel have such hope to this day is a profound window onto God's grace. Israel forgot their God and their covenant with Him (Jer. 2:32), but of Zion's wayward children God said: "Yes they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15).

Hos 4:7 *As they were multiplied, so they sinned against Me-* The multiplication refers to the material wealth of Israel under Jeroboam, and also the literal multiplying of Israel's seed in accordance with the promises to Abraham. The more Hosea showered Gomer with material blessings, the further she went from him, using it to pay her lovers to sleep with her (Hos. 2). And God had the same experience with Israel, both new and old. If we seek material blessing from God, we must remember that it is likely to lead us astray spiritually; "Jeshurun became fat, and kicked" (Dt. 32:15).

I will change their glory into shame- Again, it was Israel who had changed their glory [which should have been in their relationship with Yahweh] into the shame of idolatry (Ps. 106:20; Jer. 2:11). So God was only confirming them in what they themselves had done. Hos. 10:5 is clear that the glory of Israel was their idols. But they were to be ashamed of them; and here again there is the hint of repentance, for shame is intended to lead to repentance. This was and still is the intention of all God's anger and judgments- to elicit repentance. Perhaps Hosea's hard words to and about Gomer and her children were likewise spoken with the intention of provoking her to repentance. The pain of it all was that Gomer, like Israel with God, went through the motions of being the faithful wife.

Hos 4:8 *They feed on the sin of My people, and set their heart on their iniquity-* The "they" could be the priests, who ate the sacrifices of the people. Those sacrifices were a smoke in God's nostrils, and were "sin" (Is. 66:3). But the "they" could also refer to the idols of :7, who were thought to 'eat' or feed upon the sacrifices placed before them. The Hebrew is difficult here, and the GNB may have the idea about right: "You grow rich from the sins of my people, and so you want them to sin more and more". Gomer spent Hosea's wealth on getting men to sleep with her, and Israel squandered the riches of their spiritual inheritance on their idols. This was why the lovers wanted Gomer to sleep with them more and more. Or it could be that the priests of Yahweh were also working as priests of the shrines; for :9 goes on to say that priest and people shall perish together. They had turned Yahweh, Israel's glory, into the shame of idolatry (:7).

Hos 4:9 *It will be, like people, like priest; and I will punish them for their ways, and will repay them for their deeds-* The parallel of people and priest was perhaps because the worship of Yahweh had become mixed with that of idols; or maybe the same Levitical priests who ministered in the temple also worked at the idol shrines, as suggested on :7 and :8. Whilst leaders or spiritual facilitators [the priests] have a greater responsibility, those willingly led by them are still culpable of sin. They would alike be punished. The parallel between "ways" and "deeds" is typical of how Hebrew poetry rhymes in terms of ideas, but the two rhyming ideas are not identical, although having the same referent. Each individual deed or act of sin was felt by God, just as each of Gomer's adulteries were felt by Hosea. But the "way" of life is made up of the stream of such deeds. We can deduce from this that individual "deeds" of sin are felt and yet passed over by God; the question is whether they are so consistent and habitual that they become a "way" of life. And we need to likewise not focus upon the isolated failures of a person, but see them within the overall way of life the person has. See on :18.

Hos 4:10 *They will eat, and not feel satisfied-* This again is the theme of the prophets who criticized the Jews who returned from exile, having apparently re-entered covenant with their God. They focused upon their own satisfaction, and were not satisfied (Hag. 1:6 s.w.). I suggested on :8 that the eating in view was in the practice of eating the sacrifices offered to idols, intended to symbolize the idol eating or feeding upon the sacrifice. But this would not 'satisfy'. The same word is used in the curses for disobedience to the old covenant; Israel would eat and not be satisfied (Lev. 26:26). They looked for their satisfaction from alliances with Egypt and Assyria (Lam. 5:6 s.w.), which were spiritual adultery against Yahweh. But their relationships with Egypt and Babylon left them unsatisfied (Ez. 16:28,29). They treated wealth as their satisfaction (Ez. 7:19). As Ecclesiastes makes clear, seeking satisfaction in anything other than God's ways will leave us not satisfied. And this is the tragedy of secular man; he is never satisfied. There always has to be more travelling to reach the end of the rainbow, another million, a better house or car. Gomer was sexually addicted; but she was insatiable sexually (Ez. 16:28,29). Being unsatisfied is the nature of all addiction; see on Hos. 5:11. The same word is so often used of the righteous being satisfied in God. This is a huge blessedness.

Eating and not being satisfied is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:26). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had

broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

They will play the prostitute- They had thought that they had increased, but all such human gain is in fact not any gain, and this is even perceived by those who so seek it. See on :2. As noted above, Gomer was sexually addicted and yet never satisfied (Ez. 16:28,29), even paying men to sleep with her, and therefore only 'playing the prostitute'.

And will not increase; because they have abandoned giving to Yahweh- This could mean that Israel like Gomer would become barren, and not bear children any more to her lovers (Hos. 9:14). "Giving to" might be better translated "holding to".

Hos 4:11 *Prostitution, wine, and new wine take away the heart-* Alcohol and illicit sex are addictive; Gomer's heart had been "taken away" by them. She was sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her, and her heart was taken away by wine- perhaps a reference to the psychological disease of alcoholism, as well as to the wine drunk by Israel before their idols (Hos. 7:14). Alcoholism is wrong because it is largely a disease of the mind, in that the alcoholic keeps drinking because of a mindset which they are in; and therefore the cure is related to the things of the spirit / mind. The alcoholic cannot trust himself, their thoughts, feelings or best intentions. They persuade themselves they will really only have one drink; and invariably they end up drunk. The desire for alcohol and the need to survive as an active alcoholic makes them totally self-centred; people become [sub-consciously] merely things to be manipulated to allow the alcoholism to continue. It's a disease the mind persuades them has to be continued in at all costs. Alcoholism thus becomes the epitomy of all sinful living.

Hos 4:12 *My people consult with their wooden idol, and answer to a stick of wood-* These sticks were phallic symbols. The idea of the original seems to be that they asked of their idols and [felt they] received answers from them, or that Israel answered to the idols. Although the idols were but wood and inanimate, yet Israel "answered" or responded to them. They felt a call from them; but that call they felt from something inanimate was really the call of their own lusts which they had transferred to the idol. And that is the essence of modern day idolatry.

Indeed the spirit of prostitution has led them astray, and they have been unfaithful to their God- As Gomer was sexually addicted and insatiable, even paying men to sleep with her, so the spirit of Israel was wrong. It wasn't a case of occasional, out of character failure; but a spirit of living. They were led astray by a mindset or spirit which sought self satisfaction, rather than the satisfaction which is from God alone. And it was this spirit which "led them astray". The essential issue in our day is whether we have the Spirit of Christ, without which we are none of His, or that of the world.

Hos 4:13 *They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths, because its shade is good-* The idolatry involved sleeping with the priests or priestesses (:14); therefore "shade" and some seclusion was required.

Therefore your daughters play the prostitute- "Your daughters" may have initial reference to other children of Gomer whilst married to Hosea. They did these things because "they", Israel, their parents, did them. The implication would be that those

children of Gomer also grew up to live highly immoral lives. Again the problem with sin is the collateral damage done; others are influenced to sin. We have more influence upon others through our example than we think. Bearing in mind that the punishment for such whoredom was death, we see how God's grace in Hosea's lovely character actually contradicts the letter of the law, and certainly contradicts all natural human desire for judgment and expiation against those who have wronged us. Here was grace, pure and wonderful.

And your brides commit adultery- The sexual addiction in Israel was at such a tempo that brides committed adultery, sleeping with the male priests at the idol shrines, just as Gomer paid men to sleep with her.

Hos 4:14 *I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, nor your brides when they commit adultery; because the men consort with prostitutes, and they sacrifice with the shrine prostitutes; so the people without understanding will come to ruin themselves-* Perhaps we are to read "I will not only punish your daughters..." for being whores- because the men are equally or more guilty, in that it was the men of Israel who slept with the women of Israel in this fornication. Possibly we have here a warning against blaming prostitution simply upon the female- her behaviour is in fact dependent upon males wanting her services. The idea is that God need not additionally punish Israel because sin is its own punishment; they would ruin themselves. And I have noted throughout this chapter that so many of the Divine judgments upon Israel were merely a reflection of how they themselves acted. Punishment for adultery, sexual sin and idolatry was very clear within the Law of Moses. But God says He will do this; He would let sin be its own punishment. Hosea likewise thought of punishing Gomer for her unfaithfulness, including judging her as a prostitute was to be judged under the Law; but he refrained. All this behaviour was because the people lacked "understanding". The reference is not to incorrect theology, but to the "understanding" which is part of 'knowing' God in a relationship (Is. 6:10; Jer. 4:22). Hosea concludes with an appeal for "understanding" in the sense of walking in God's ways (Hos. 14:9).

Hos 4:15 *Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, yet don't let Judah offend-* In the end, Judah behaved more immorally than Israel did (Ez. 23:4,11,18). I suggested on Hos. 3:1 that perhaps Hosea married two wives who were both prostitutes. Hosea's hope was that the second one would not be so bad, and this reflected God's hope for Judah. It is so tragic that God's dearest desires for people often don't come true. He so respects human freewill that He will never force obedience or devotion to Him, just as Hosea would not force this to come about.

And don't come to Gilgal, neither go up to Beth Aven, nor swear, 'As Yahweh lives'- These locations were just over the border from Judah, in the territory of Israel. Judah could just cross over briefly into Israelite territory and perform idolatry at the shrines there and then return to Judah. "Beth Aven" is literally 'house of vanity / idols'; perhaps the idea is that Beth El, the house of God, had become a house of idols as Israel had made Yahweh worship into idol worship. Gilgal had shrines (Jud. 3:19; Hos. 12:11) and was very attractive to Judah as a place of sin (Am. 4:4; 5:5). "All their wickedness is in Gilgal" (Hos. 9:15) shows how utterly abhorrent this is to God; to maintain an appearance of superior devotion to Him, whilst briefly slipping over the border to sin. This is the besetting weakness of our age; quietly, online, unseen by others, we can slip over the border to regular idolatry and then return. The oath "As Yahweh lives" was the oath of exclusive loyalty to Him; and yet God's people swore

by Him and also by their idols (Dt. 10:20; Zeph. 1:5). Just as Gomer appeared faithful to Hosea, and yet slipped off to her lovers. It is a powerful challenge to us, demanding our total and exclusive loyalty to God; for anything less is adultery and idolatry.

When they swore falsely, they would mention God's Name. Jer. 5:2 observes the same. "They swear 'As the Lord lives,' they, nevertheless, swear falsely".

Hos 4:16 *For Israel has behaved extremely stubbornly, like a stubborn heifer. Then how will Yahweh feed them like a lamb in a meadow!*- There is an intended dissonance between the images of a stubborn heifer in a stall refusing to be goaded or coaxed and backsliding (AV) away from her owner; and a lamb being fed by a shepherd in a meadow. This was how things could have been; but Israel would not. God dreamed of it, as Hosea fantasized about a remarriage with Hosea. This was the whole tragedy of the Hosea-Gomer relationship, and of that between the God of all passionate love and His unfaithful people. The ten tribes to whom Hosea was prophesying had made God in the image of a heifer or calf (1 Kings 12:28). And they had become like that which they worshipped. That principle is true for us all.

Hos 4:17 *Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone!*- "Joined" alludes to how a man is "joined" to a woman in marriage and the sexual act. Again the simile continues; Israel's worship of idols was adultery against God. And in practice, they worshipped idols through performing the sexual act of joining. It could be that this verse is a direct warning from God to Hosea to stop trying to appeal to Ephraim, the ten tribes. The way Hosea apparently kept trying with them would therefore have been a reflection of his lifelong efforts with Gomer. And yet God like Hosea has never left Ephraim alone, despite his being joined / married to idols. We see throughout the wonderful passion of God, expressing His rightful sense of hurt and disengagement with Israel, and yet His love and grace continuing that engagement.

"Leave him alone" may be God's word to Hosea, telling him to stop trying to win them back. But Hosea does continue, just as he gave up with Gomer at times, or felt like doing so, but kept trying with her.

Hos 4:18 *Their drink has become sour. They play the prostitute continually. Her rulers dearly love their shameful way*- See on 7:4 *Burning*. This is the last stage of the addiction process; the drink is distasteful, "sour", but is still drunk. The "way" is loved to the end, despite the shame. "They play the prostitute continually" is just two words in the Hebrew: "Prostitution, prostitution". They were sexually addicted just as Gomer was. This is the end result of dabbling in sin, like dabbling with narcotics. What is of the essence is our "way"; see on :9. Occasional sin becomes a way of life, or an addiction.

Hos 4:19 *The wind has wrapped her up in its wings*- This ultimately came true in Zech. 5:9: "Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven"- and carried it back to Babylon. As explained on :18, their dabbling in sin, hopping over the border to commit idolatry in Israel (:15), had led them to shameless addiction. They were now to be carried by the wind- both into captivity in Babylon and scattering in Assyria, and also spiritually or literally scattered back to Babylon even after they returned from exile, which is the context of Zech. 5.

And they shall be unfulfilled in the offering of their sacrifices- As noted on :10, there is a major theme of unfulfilment. Gomer was not satisfied by her affairs; she

became sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her. This is the tragic end of all who follow the flesh. Their sacrifices to the idols, or to Yahweh, would not bring satisfaction because of their deep psychological devotion to their own flesh and their resistance of 'knowing' Yahweh, having a relationship with Him which was exclusive and took their entire heart.

HOSEA CHAPTER 5

Hos 5:1 *Listen to this, you priests! Listen, house of Israel, and give ear, house of the king!*- The royal family, the priests and the ordinary people are all addressed; we note on :9 that Hosea went throughout the land appealing to the ordinary people. The masses cannot pass off responsibility to their leadership, neither can the leadership blame the people. For God values the human person, and judges our individual response to Him. We note Hosea's bravery in witnessing against the royal family and those in religious power. The motivation for such bravery was surely love, in that he hoped for their repentance. For that is what his message is all about. The appeal for them to "listen" to their judgment was because even though judgment had been pronounced, there was still room for repentance. According to :7, it could have been just one month or new moon after which judgment would come.

For the judgment is against you- As noted on Hos. 4:1,4, there is a legal case between God and Israel; and the judgment is against them.

For you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread on Tabor- They were condemned for their negative influence upon others, acting as a snare and trap. Making others stumble is so abhorrent to God; we need to carefully search our positions and our ways lest we are making others stumble. Mizpah ['watchtower'] was in the east and Tabor ['high place'] in the west; the idea was that all the high places across the land were used by the priests to ensnare people. There is a Jewish tradition that these two places were where sentries were placed to stop people going to the Jerusalem temple; they therefore became the scene of ambushes and murders of those Israelites who were on their way up to Jerusalem for Yahweh worship; and they were murdered there (:2). Hos. 6:9 seems to support this.

We must recall that Gomer was a cult prostitute, and the priests were priests of both Yahweh and Baal. For Israel never formally abrogated Yahweh. They claimed to worship Him through Baal. Gomer slept with the priests, but the priests are accused by Hosea of murdering the faithful Yahweh worshippers and seeking to lead them astray. He was a Yahweh worshipper. His wife was sleeping with the very men who were out to take his life, and who murdered his faithful friends and brethren. His abiding love and commitment to her looks forward to that of Yahweh towards an Israel who slew His Son and His true people.

Hos 5:2 *The rebels are deep in slaughter; but I discipline all of them-* As noted on :1, this could refer to ambushes of the faithful Israelites on their way to Jerusalem for Godly worship, as in Hos. 6:9. But the text is difficult; hence GNB "A deep pit at Acacia City, and I will punish all of you" and LXX: "Which they that hunt the prey have fixed: but I will correct you".

Hos 5:3 *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me-* As noted on :1, Hosea is pleading with Israel to "listen" to God's judgment, and to realize the most basic reality- that God sees and knows all, and nothing can be hidden from Him. The basis

for this was in Hosea obviously knowing that Gomer was acting as a prostitute whilst married to him. We can like her go on in sin, comfortably numb to God's knowledge and judgment of all.

For now, Ephraim, you have played the prostitute; Israel is defiled- Ephraim is sometimes used as a title of Israel, the ten tribes; but here and in :5 there appears to be a difference. Perhaps Hosea had a ministry in the tribal area of Ephraim and warned them specifically. Perhaps it was geographically within Ephraim that there were many idol shrines, which in turn caused defilement to all Israel.

Hos 5:4 Their deeds won't allow them to turn to their God; for the spirit of prostitution is within them, and they don't know Yahweh- As explained on Hos. 4:12, Israel were addicted to idolatry just as Gomer was sexually addicted. See on Hos. 7:4 *Burning*. It wasn't that they sinned so awfully that they could never repent; repentance is always possible. But the problem with sin is that it gains a psychological grip upon people. Their deeds of sin were done due to a "spirit of prostitution", and they would not allow the influence of God's Spirit to create within them a new psychology. We see this in people today, who continue in sin up until their graveplanks because they will not accept a new pair of eyes, the new psychology and structuring of desires which only God's Spirit can give. They resisted the Holy Spirit, which sought to turn them to God (Is. 63:10; Acts 7:51). Acts 3:26 is clear that the blessing of the gift of the Spirit is to be turned to God away from our sins. But God will not force His way upon the human heart or spirit if we are resistant to it. If we are open to it, then indeed we find that strength to think and act differently. They refused to know Yahweh, to have a relationship with Him, instead seeing their duty to Him as merely a few ritual acts which were isolated from their heart. See on Hos. 6:6 for what is implied in knowing Yahweh.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14). The contrast is with how "I know Ephraim" (Hos. 5:3), but Ephraim wouldn't know Yahweh, "they do not know Yahweh" (Hos. 5:4). It's just as Hosea was told to love a woman who was in love with another man (Hos. 3:1,2).

Hos 5:5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face. Therefore Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity, Judah also will stumble with them- As noted on :3, Ephraim is sometimes used as a title of Israel, the ten tribes; but here and in :3 there appears to be a difference. Perhaps Hosea had a ministry in the tribal area of Ephraim and warned them specifically. It is pride which hinders human repentance (Hos. 7:10; Jer. 13:17). They knew it; for in the legal language of the courtroom which fills these chapters, their pride testified against them. But they refused to do anything about it. There is a difference between the stumbling and the iniquity; it could be that the sin of pride made them stumble, and call into sin. And Judah were influenced by Israel's pride.

It's hard to know if the prophecies in Hosea are chronological; he prophesied over a long period in various geographical areas, to both Israel and Judah. It's interesting to speculate as to whether the appeal of Hos. 4:15 was before or after Hos. 5:5. Hosea now clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). Likewise, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited

in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would be saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

Stumbling is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:37). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 5:6 *They will go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Yahweh; but they won't find Him- He has withdrawn Himself from them-* See on Hos. 2:11 *Her feasts*. Sacrifice alone will not please God (Is. 1:11-15). Yet God promises that He will always be found of those who seek Him. So their seeking of God with herds of sacrifices would not "find" Him; for He desires mercy and knowledge / relationship with Him, not sacrifice and ritual (Hos. 6:6). The fate of the rejected will be to seek God at judgment day, when it is all too late; for life is the time to seek Him. The Lord quotes these words about an Israel who all too late will seek Him, at judgment day (Jn. 7:34).

It was of course Yahweh's desire they would seek Him (:15), but their seeking was on a surface level. We can seek but not seek. Yahweh's hope was that His people would finally "seek Yahweh their God" (Hos. 3:5). This was Hosea's fantasy for Gomer; as in Hos. 2:7, his hope was that Gomer would "seek" her lovers and not find them, and return to him. This was God's hope for Israel too; "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15). But they didn't. But it can happen- people "seek" the wrong things and give up, and then "seek" Yahweh. But sadly, most people, like Gomer, like Israel, waste their lives "seeking" the end of a rainbow and never get there.

Hos 5:7 *They are unfaithful to Yahweh; for they have begotten foreign children-* See on Hos. 2:4 *Her children*. As Gomer had children by her lovers whilst married to Hosea, so Israel bore fruit to the Gentiles through worshipping their idols. Jer. 3:20 speaks of this unfaithfulness to Yahweh as what brought about the Babylonian invasion of Judah. But Hosea's words have relevance to the Assyrian invasion of the ten tribes as well.

Hosea married Gomer knowing she would be unfaithful, and Yahweh likewise married Israel at Sinai. The same word is used in Is. 48:8 "For I knew that you would deal very treacherously [unfaithfully]". Isaiah was contemporary with Hosea. This foreknowledge of human rejection makes God's love the more amazing.

Now the new moon will devour them- Or as AV "Now shall a month devour them" (as in Zech. 11:8). Maybe Hosea uttered this judgment just one new moon or month before judgment was going to fall. God states judgment to come, giving Nineveh 40 days to repent, but in the gap between His word and its execution, we can repent. This gives intensity to our lives.

With their fields- Literally, "with their portions", a term used about their idols in Is. 57:6; Jer. 10:16. We become like what we worship; they were identified with their idols, and would be destroyed along with them. We worship God who is eternal, and are thus identified with eternity.

Hos 5:8 *Blow the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah! Sound a battle cry at Beth Aven, behind you, Benjamin!-* These towns in Benjamin were where the invader was to come. The picture is of Benjamin having turned their backs and being chased by the invaders uttering their battle cry. The scene of these towns fleeing before the Assyrians is found again in Is. 10:29. Hosea may have been consciously repeating Isaiah's message. The trumpets were blown to warn of invaders; I suggested

on :7 that Hosea's audience had but a month to repent. The invaders were upon them. There was an urgency in this call to repentance, as there is for us. For "the judge stands before the door", now as never before in human history. Again we see Hosea prophesying immediately before the Assyrian invasion; even at that late point, he was offering Israel a new covenant, just as Hosea was offering Gomer a remarriage on a new covenant before he has to judge her. Likewise :7 "Now shall a month devour them" could mean that in a month's time the king of Assyria would be upon them.

Perhaps the judgment was for the sin of crowning Saul, who was in Gibeah, and for disobeying Samuel, who was from Ramah. Beth Aven is another name for Bethel, where the calves were (Josh. 7:2).

Hos 5:9 *Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke*- The "desolation" was a "rebuke", and a rebuke is aimed at reformation. The terrible judgments at the hands of Babylon and Assyria were to be used positively as an appeal for repentance, and not simply the outpouring of the anger of an offended omnipotent being. "A desolation" can also mean 'they shall be bewildered and unable to say anything'. That is exactly the position of the condemned at the day of judgment.

Among the tribes of Israel, I have made known that which will certainly be- This is Hosea's summary of his mission amongst the ten tribes; he had gone up and down, as we should, imploring people desperately to repent. His mission was not simply a one time statement to the royal family and priesthood; see on :1. It would "certainly be" on one hand, and yet the whole purpose of Hosea's proclamation was so that it would not be. This is no sign of any capricious, not serious God. Rather does it reflect how sensitive He is to human repentance, and how our appeal for repentance can really make an eternal difference in outcomes which are otherwise "certain".

Hos 5:10 *The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out My wrath on them like water*- "Landmark" is literally "border"; the reference may not be so much to removing ancient landmarks, but specifically to the removal of the borders on the laver by Ahaz and his princes in 2 Kings 16:17 in order that the Assyrian idol altar could be placed there. This would explain the pouring out of God's wrath because of the removal of borders. If the reference is to princes literally removing landmarks, we can perceive that such apparently small, secret, unnoticed attempts to expand our wealth base at others' expense call forth the uttermost anger of God Almighty. The removal of the landmarks may allude to how this was secretly done bit by bit over the generations by bad neighbours, and it spoke of how Judah had edged closer to their wicked neighbours in Israel.

Hos 5:11 *Ephraim is oppressed, he is crushed in judgment*- The "judgment" of :1, which had been uttered and was yet future, but could be averted. But it was as if the judgment was already upon them, hence the present tense. We too live under Divine judgment, yet can repent and change the judgment, as Paul explains in Romans. They had "crushed" the needy (Am. 4:1 s.w.), and so their judgment was appropriate to how they had acted toward the needy. See on Hos. 6:5.

Because he is obsessed in his pursuit of idols- This obsession is the language of addiction; see on Hos. 4:10. They were judged not for individual acts of failure, but because of their way of mental being, their obsession with sin; see on :4. The AV "Because he willingly walked after the commandment" could refer to the commandment of Jeroboam to worship the calves rather than at the Jerusalem temple;

likewise the commands of king Omri to perform idolatry were kept religiously as if they were Divine commands (Mic. 6:16).

Hos 5:12 Therefore I am to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness- In Hos. 4:15, God had earlier entertained hope that Judah would be different; but now He speaks as if both Israel and Judah would alike be judged. This reflects how God's hopes and intentions, like those of Hosea for Gomer, were so often disappointed. We as it were feel for Him. The language here still continues the marriage reference; for "She that makes ashamed is (to her husband) as rottenness in his bones" (Prov. 12:4). Is. 50:9 uses the same figure about the restored community being a moth-eaten garment, and the New Testament understands that as meaning that it was permanently destroyed and would be replaced by the covering which is in Christ.

Hos 5:13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound- Again, this is Isaiah's language for the state of Judah (Is. 1:6); Jer. 30:12 says that the wound was "incurable", but we must remember that Hosea here is desperately appealing for repentance so that they could be cured. So it was "incurable" by human help.

Then Ephraim went to Assyria- Menahem in 2 Kings 15:19 gave 1000 talents of silver to Pul, and Hoshea likewise appealed to Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3). Likewise also to Ahaz of Judah. He gave a bribe to Tiglath-pileser to assist him against Rezin the king of Aram (2 Kings 16:8). "He is not able to heal you" would then refer to 2 Chron. 28:21 : "and he gave it to the king of Assyria, but he did not help him".

And sent to king Jareb- This clause matches what Judah did when he saw his wound. Jareb ought rather to be translated, 'their defender'; in Jud. 6:32, Jerub, as in Jerubbaal, means 'to plead one's cause'. This is another example of courtroom language. God had made the case against His people; but He would also be the pleader of their cause. But instead they turned to human strength.

But he is not able to heal you, neither will he cure you of your wound- Hosea prophesied in the time of Hezekiah (Hos. 1:1). He was contemporary with Isaiah, whom he often quotes or alludes to [or did Isaiah quote from Hosea?]. At this time, Judah had sent to Jareb, just as Hezekiah sought help from Egypt to avert God's judgment. But it was not yet manifest that this "Jareb" would be unable to heal them. So Hosea may have been prophesying this at the time of Hezekiah's sickness, during which it seems Hezekiah sent to Egypt for help. All this became so relevant for Hezekiah; his incurable sickness at the time was comparable to that of Judah. But he was saved out of it, just as Judah were saved from the Assyrians. But like Judah, he was ungrateful and unresponsive to such great grace, just as Gomer was to Hosea's grace.

Hos 5:14 For I will be to Ephraim like a lion, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear in pieces and go away; I will carry off, and there will be no one to deliver- "I myself" reflects the intensity of God's manifestation through the 'lions' of Babylon and Assyria. Even if we were to read that the Lord Jesus was 'God Himself', this would not justify the erroneous idea of the Trinity; God can be intensely manifested in individuals who are not Him personally. God can be manifest in a tiny moth (:12) as well as like a roaring lion who tears in pieces; Hosea here is quoting Ps. 50:22. The 'carrying off' of Judah to Babylon was therefore done by God; and yet the analogy requires that God took them to Babylon as a lion carries the prey. So in wrath

He remembered mercy, and as it were went with the to Babylon. Thus Ezekiel saw the cherubim of glory leave Jerusalem and then reappear amongst the captives in Babylon.

Being ravaged by wild animals is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:22). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 5:15 *I will go and return to My place, until they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face-* The allusion is to a lion returning to his "place" or lair. But the lion does so with his prey. Again there is grace in these judgments; God would as it were go with His judged people to Babylon. The Hebrew idea may be of 'accepting the punishment of their offence'. The hope of God, as of Hosea with Gomer, was that they would repent after a period. The prophecies of the restoration were contingent therefore upon Judah and Israel repenting in their captivity. But they did not, and therefore Dan. 9 explains that the 70 years captivity prophecy of Jeremiah had to be recalculated because they had not repented. See on Dan. 9:26. To seek someone's face was to beg their grace and favour. But this would only happen because they repented.

"I will go and return" matches the words He placed in the mouths of Israel in :1: "Let us go and return to the Lord". He hoped that His actions would elicit theirs, there was to be a parallel between them. But they didn't respond.

"Offence" translates the Hebrew word also translated "guilt". Unlike in English, Biblical Hebrew has no direct term for "guilt". The word is sometimes translated "guilt" and sometimes "sin", or similar. The offence, the sin, is the guilt. Repentance is about taking guilt, and realizing that it is in God [through the Lord Jesus] that guilt is dealt with and taken away. The guilty can still seek His face. But Israel, like Gomer, refused to take guilt. They bought in to the modern narrative that they were 'awesome', sin was merely a technical matter. And so there was no desperate seeking of God's face.

In their affliction they will seek Me earnestly- This was God's hope, as it was that of Hosea for Gomer. But it didn't come about as He hoped and intended. The exiles who returned did so largely in the hope of personal betterment in Judah, and most of them remained in Babylon and Persia. This was God's hope for the holocaust... but still it didn't happen.

HOSEA CHAPTER 6

Hos 6:1 *Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for He has torn us to pieces, and He will heal us; He has injured us, and He will bind up our wounds-* This threatened attack by the lion of Hos. 5:15 has now happened. In the analogy, an animal torn to pieces by a lion is dead and cannot be healed. But Hosea appeals for repentance amongst the remnant in line with God's hope that they would repent in Hos. 5:15. Their revival would be a miracle because it would be like resurrecting (:2) and healing an animal torn to pieces by a lion. Hosea urges them to understand that it was God who had done this; the invading armies were His hand. The idea of returning to God and being healed is found in Jeremiah in the context of the potential for the exiles to return from Babylon and re-establish God's Kingdom in the land (Jer. 30:17). Hosea's prophecy was encouraging them to do this. But the exiles who did return didn't do so

seeking for such healing, and most preferred not to return to the land at all. The prophecy therefore looks ahead to the latter day repentance of Israel before the reestablishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Lord Jesus. But :1-3 are the fantasy of Yahweh that His people would say these words, just as Hosea fantasizes about Gomer's return to him and acceptance of his offer of a new marriage under a new covenant.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

Hos 6:2 *After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him-* The two and three days may simply mean that if Israel were to repent and seek healing (see on :1), then literally in a matter of days afterwards they would have a national revival, akin to resurrection. 'Two or three' means 'a few' in Is. 17:6; Lk. 13:32,33. See on Hos. 8:10. Another option is that the two days are two days of judgment, upon Israel and Judah. The third day or time of judgment was intended to be their salvation, but still the Divine program had to be

extended. The Assyrians were about to overrun Israel and the Babylonian threat was about to burst upon Judah, later in Hosea's ministry. We could just read this literally- that Yahweh could turn things around within a matter of a few days. But Israel would not. It is not over interpretation to see these words as applicable to the Lord's death and resurrection. After all, we must give due weight to 1 Cor. 15:4: "Christ rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures". Which Scriptures speak of a resurrection on the third day? The pattern of Jonah is only an indirect teaching. This passage in Hosea would appear the only direct prophecy of a resurrection on the third day. And we can also legitimately translate "he will raise him up". "And we shall live in his sight" then becomes the message that His resurrection becomes the pattern and possibility for that of all God's people.

As explained on :1, an animal caught by a lion and torn to pieces is dead. To speak of it being healed is therefore tantamount to a belief in resurrection. The wounds which were to be healed speak of the spiritual sickness of Israel; this was to be cured, so that the spiritually revived nation would live with new life "before Him". Sin would no longer be a barrier precluding being in His presence, and again they would be "before Him" as His covenant people. Literally the Hebrew is "to live in His sight", which would imply in the land of promise (2 Kings 17:20). The restoration from exile is in view. The same word for "revive" is repeatedly used in Ez. 37 of how the dry bones of Israel in captivity would be revived, given life by the Spirit which was to be the gift of the new covenant they would enter with God. And Hosea concludes with the hope that such revival would come to Israel (Hos. 14:7). The gift of revival, of spiritual life, would be given when they sought the Lord (Am. 5:4 s.w.). Hosea likewise in his distress over Gomer had oscillated between wanting to kill her and yet dreaming of an outdoor wedding ceremony when he remarries her and they then bring forth fruit (Hos. 2). But this didn't happen. And neither did it happen between God and His people after the restoration from Babylon. And so the prophecy and the promised gift of spiritual life has been recalculated and reapplied- to us. Note that it is God who does the reviving; always the work of the Spirit is of His initiative. We see a clear reference to the idea of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus "on the third day". And it becomes a description of Israel seeking to repent in the last days, wishing to associate themselves with the resurrection of Christ, so that when He returns they might share in it. Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord's return.

Hos 6:3 *Let us acknowledge Yahweh. Let us press on to know Yahweh-* Again this is the fantasy of God for Israel, as it was Hosea's for Gomer, that they would say these words. Israel, like Gomer regarding Hosea, never denied Yahweh. They acknowledged Him as their God, as Gomer acknowledged Hosea as her husband. But they only knew *about* Yahweh, rather than knowing Him in personal relationship. To "know Yahweh" would bring about the appearance of a Messianic Kingdom in the terms of the second stanza of this verse. But it was repentance which would bring that about (see on Hos. 5:15). This is to know God. And so often, Christian groups have become so fixated with knowing *about* God, correctly interpreting this or that Bible passage or theme, enshrining it in their statements of faith, that they have not known Yahweh in terms of personal relationship. All the failures of natural Israel are warnings to Israel after the Spirit. True theology is all about the radical transformation of human life in practice. The AV is helpful: "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord". If we seek that relationship - knowledge with Him, "then shall we

know". The Lord maybe alluded to this passage in teaching that if anyone seeks to know God's will and do it, i.e. to have relationship with Him, then he will intuitively know or discern true doctrine or teaching; see on Jn. 7:17.

As surely as the sun rises, Yahweh will appear. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth- Ps. 72:6 and Mal. 4:2 use exactly this imagery to describe the Messianic Kingdom to be established at the return of the Lord Jesus. The gift of rain was to be the result of obedience (Dt. 11:14), but the obedience required was simply repentance and a desire for relationship with God. The return from exile could have potentially seen the Kingdom of God re-established in Israel under a Messianic king. But so much potential was wasted. Yahweh would have appeared, so that as Ez. 48 concludes, the rebuilt temple was known as the place where 'Yahweh is there', in some form. But the Jews did not repent, nor did they rebuild the temple nor manage it according to the commands of Ez. 40-48.

Yahweh's love for Israel is as certain as the dawn, as the sun coming up. He loved them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). But this figure is repeated in :4; Israel's love for God was like the dew that appears at dawn but is banished away by the rising sun. It's a pathetic figure of Divine love being rejected and not achieving response. God desired steadfast love, like His for Israel (:6), not temporary love.

Hos 6:4 Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you? For your love is like a morning cloud, and like the dew that disappears early- As often in the prophets, the personal pronouns change. Hosea has been speaking in :3, and now God Himself directly appeals to the people; Hosea is so taken over with God's Spirit and identity with God's cause that he speaks for God in the first person. God's feelings here were exactly how Hosea had felt about Gomer, desperate to do something which would make her love him in truth rather than just as an appearance. The morning dew cloud disappears as the sun rises; but in :3, the sunrise has been used of the coming of Messiah and reestablishment of the Kingdom (as in Mal. 4:2). Instead of that sunrise, there was another one. The same language of the morning cloud vanishing is used of Israel themselves in Hos. 13:3; their attitude to God was them. And so we too are ultimately defined by our attitude towards God.

Hos 6:5 Therefore I have cut them to pieces with the prophets; I slew them with the words of My mouth. Your judgments are like a flash of lightning- God's word hewed Israel like a hammer (Jer. 23:29); and the lightning flashes recall the cherubim of Ezekiel's visions. God's word is presented here as His actions. His word of slaughter was as if they had been slain; just as in creation, He spoke and it was done. As noted on Hos. 5:11, God's judgements against Israel happened as soon as they were spoken; yet there was a gap between the statement being uttered and it being actualized on earth. In that gap, with Israel already under condemnation, they could change the verdict by their repentance. Paul develops this theme in his legal argument in Rom. 1-8. We too stand in that gap, condemned at the present judgment seat of God; and yet in Christ we can change the verdict. This gives intensity to life, and deep gratitude for the freedom from condemnation we now experience in the Lord Jesus. See on Hos. 8:8.

The "flash of lightning" or "storm" may refer to Baal as the supposed storm god who threw bolts of lightning in judgment. Yahweh would act as they imagined Baal to act.

Hos 6:6 *For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*- Showing mercy is here paralleled with the knowledge of God. I explained on :3 that the knowledge of God in terms of relationship meant repentance and the grateful receiving of forgiveness by His grace. This is here paralleled with our showing mercy. For we cannot really experience that forgiveness without in turn showing mercy to others. We will forgive, as we have been forgiven. If we do not forgive, then we have not really known forgiveness on a personal level. The simple cure for unforgiveness is to let ourselves be convicted of the weight of our personal sins, and on that basis to allow our forgiveness of others to follow as part of a natural process. Mic. 6:6-8 makes the same point- that ritual sacrifice, even of ones own child, is not required [even under the old covenant] as much as loving mercy and humility before God as a result of realizing our sinfulness.

"Mercy" [*hesed*] is parallel with 'knowing God'. Experience of relationship with God, if it is legitimate, results in a merciful attitude to others. But Israel were abusive of others within their society, because they had not been humbled by God's mercy towards them. But *hesed* can as well mean 'covenant love'. To know God is to be in covenant love with Him. To love God is to know Him, and vice versa. Knowledge of God is thus defined not as technical knowledge in brain cells, but intimacy in relationship. And that is what divides those claiming the Name of Jesus- those who know Him, and those who still have only technical knowledge of Him. The conversion to intimacy in relationship often comes at some point after initial 'conversion' to Christ. In the Hosea-Gomer parallel, we see Hosea so earnestly wishing for intimacy with Gomer, when instead she only gave him the external signs of her loyalty. "I desire mercy" can as well be translated "I love covenant love". We can touch the heart of God by loving Him and being intimate with Him.

In the Hosea-Gomer context, Hosea wanted Gomer to love him, with *hesed* love, rather than excuse herself by saying she must offer sacrifices- which involved her sleeping with the offerers. For she was a cult prostitute. So "love me, rather than offering your sacrifices supposedly to Yahweh but actually to Baal, with all the sex stuff that goes with that" is what Hosea felt with her. He wanted her *hesed*, her covenant love, the love of marriage and committed relationship, her intimacy in relationship; he wanted the gift of her love for him, not physical gifts, tokenistic love. The Lord in His quotations of Hos. 6:6, sees this as being no better than trusting in works rather than grace for salvation, and refusing to fellowship with sinners.

Hos. 6:6 is twice quoted by the Lord (Mt. 9:13; 12:7). He clearly saw it as programmatic. He used it as the rationale for why He had an open table for sinners: "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?... He said: They that are sick need a doctor, not they that are healthy. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. I come not to call the righteous but sinners". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *hesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *hesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshipping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt.

12:7). Covenant love, *hesed*, meant for the Lord- an open table to sinners, not being critical in a casuistic sense, showing grace. If we don't do this, we fail to be truly in covenant with God. Israel had broken the old covenant, which required animal sacrifices. This demand for *hesed* covenant love, rather than sacrifice, can be read as part of God's offer of a new covenant. Based on love and grace rather than sacrifice, just as Hosea offered Gomer a new marriage on the basis of love, without sacrifices and the sex rituals that went with them.

If the Pharisees had grasped grace, they would not have condemned the disciples for a technical infringement of the law by making flour on the Sabbath. It is in this context that Hos. 6:6 is quoted by the Lord in Mt. 12:7. These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He *desires* / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If He delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

Just as Gomer claimed to "know" Hosea, so Israel cried out that "My God, we [do] know You" (Hos. 8:2). Israel's attitude to the Law can so easily be our attitude to God and to the first principles of the Gospel, the New Covenant, in which we stand. We can 'know' it all, and externally keep it... but in reality not know it at all, focusing on the external sacrifices whilst knowing nothing of the God we supposedly worship. All this was exemplified by Gomer being an observant Jewess, whilst worshipping Baal and living a shameful life. She broke the marriage covenant as Israel like Adam "transgressed the covenant" (6:7; Hos. 8:1). Israel / Gomer knew the Law on one level, but "the great things of my law... were counted as a strange thing" (Hos. 8:12). They called upon the Most High, but refused to exalt Him in their hearts (Hos. 11:7). The very experience and fact of 'knowing' God's word on a surface level, as academic theology, can mask the fact that to 'know' Him in practice is quite a different thing. The simple possession of the right knowledge *about* Him can of itself deceive us. This ought to provoke constant self-examination. As Gomer protested that she 'knew' Hosea and was in covenant relationship with him, so Israel did to God. Hosea's reference to *daath elohim*, the knowledge of God, has been observed as strikingly intimate, hinting as it does of God 'knowing' His people and them knowing Him, in the same way as a man 'knows' a woman. Hence the utter pain

of Hos. 5:4: "The spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not [i.e. sexually] the Lord"- although they 'knew' so many others, they were sexually obsessed. This was God's pain, lived out by Hosea. It was that very "knowledge of God" which He desired, rather than burnt offerings (Hos. 6:6). For as Amos put it, "You only have I known..." (Am. 3:2).

Hos 6:7 *But they, like Adam, have broken the covenant-* The basis for this was Gomer breaking her marriage covenant with Hosea by adultery. Covenant breaking is as marital unfaithfulness. Adam's sin was in attempting to cover his sin and refusing to repent (Job 31:33). But we may well ask, What covenant did Adam break by his simple act of disobedience? I suggested in commentary upon Gen. 1-3 that the land of Eden with its sanctuary was the *eretz* promised to Israel, with the temple within it; and Adam's exile eastward for breaking the covenant was matched by Israel's exile to the east. The covenant was simple- he was to care for the land / garden, and not eat the forbidden fruit. Although he was not immortal, if he did that, he would live for ever. Eternity is that simple. Or it could have been for Adam, and also for Israel.

Adam being a sinner is used here as representative of the Jews, inadequately covered by the fig leaves which represented the Jewish way of covering sin. Their glossy appearance which soon faded well represented the inadequacy of this method.

They were unfaithful to Me, there- The "there" is very hard to interpret unless we accept that as suggested above, there was a parallel intended between the garden of Eden with its sanctuary, and the *eretz* promised to Israel with its sanctuary in Jerusalem. Adam and Israel broke their covenant relationship in the same place, the *eretz* of Eden. Alternatively we can read "Adam" as the geographical location at which they entered the promised land. Hence, "there" they were unfaithful to me, and this would fit with the geographical references in the next verse.

Hos 6:8 *Gilead is a city of those who work iniquity; it is stained with blood-* "Blood" often stands for guiltiness for blood, and in :9 we see that the priests were actually murdering the faithful. There may also be reference to the men of Gilead killing the king Pekahiah (2 Kings 15:25). Gilead was perhaps a location where this happened, and Hosea went there to rebuke them. It was a shrine of false worship, where pagan sacrifices were made in the name of Yahweh worship (Hos. 12:11). Gilead had been intended as a city of refuge from the guilt of innocent blood, but instead it was stained with its own guilt for blood. So much Divine potential was wasted, as it is today; it all makes God an almost tragic figure. How thrilled He must be that we at least try to perceive the potentials and realize them.

Hos 6:9 *As gangs of robbers wait to ambush a man, so the company of priests murder in the way toward Shechem, committing shameful crimes-* As noted on Hos. 5:1,2, this could refer to ambushes of the faithful Israelites on their way to Jerusalem for Godly worship. The road near Shechem was where such pilgrims would have passed. The LXX supports this view by rendering: "The priests have hid the way". Shechem as Gilead was a city of refuge; those seeking refuge were slain by the priests who should have saved them. Or perhaps here we have an example of extreme language [here, of murder] being used about those things which would be judged far less severely in human eyes; akin to the Lord teaching that hatred in the heart is the same as murder. The road to the main idolatrous shrine at Bethel passed by Shechem, and perhaps the encouragement of the priests to go there and worship the calves was tantamount to

spiritual murder. "The company of priests" is elsewhere translated 'the charming / enchantment'. Hosea was a faithful worshipper of Yahweh, married to a woman who slept with the priests as part of her cult prostitution. And those men were murdering Hosea's brethren. For all we know he may himself have been a priest.

Hos 6:10 *In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing. There is prostitution in Ephraim. Israel is defiled-* The "I" in the context appears to be God. But this could also be an interjection from Hosea, as if he was shocked now that he realized the extent to which Ephraim had been adulterous against God Himself. We certainly get the impression of shock. God is omnipotent and yet He limits His power; and He may limit His omniscience in order to enter into relationship with us. Hence He speaks of His disappointments and dashed hopes; "surely they will reverence My Son" is the acutest example. And so even God was as it were shocked at the realization of the extent of Israel's unfaithfulness, just as Hosea was with Gomer. See on Hos. 7:1. The idea that 'God has now seen the prostitution in Israel' reflects how on one hand, Hosea knew Gomer was a whore. Even before he married her. But the full realization of it only dawned later. And so it was with God almighty. If we enquire *why* there was this delayed recognition of reality... the answer is one word. Love.

Hos 6:11 *Also, Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you, when I restore the fortunes of My people-* The idea may be that the men of Judah at that time would reap a harvest of condemnation when the fortunes of Israel were restored at Messiah's coming, and the dead raised and judged. This is the idea expressed in Mt. 23:39; see note there. This will be the reason for the weeping and gnashing of teeth by the rejected; seeing others saved and themselves rejected eternally. The restoration of the fortunes of God's people was intended to happen at the return from exile in Babylon (Jer. 30:3; Am. 9:14); but it did not, and has been reinterpreted and recalculated as our restoration in Christ, to be literally realized at the Lord's return to earth (Zeph. 3:20). Judah and Israel were sowing, as we are, according to our way of life now; and there will for sure be the harvest of this at judgment day (Hos. 8:7; 10:13).

Judah's "appointed" time of judgment was when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time. For this is when Hosea was prophesying. But just as Hezekiah's time of death was delayed, God is so open that this appointed time was also delayed.

HOSEA CHAPTER 7

Hos 7:1 *When I would heal Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, also the wickedness of Samaria-* I suggested on Hos. 6:10 that God as it were limits His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, so that He can enter into legitimate real time relationship with us humans. Hence the expressions of Divine shock and disappointment we meet in the Bible. The healing of Israel was intended to come at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 30:17). I explained on Hos. 6:1 that God had promised to "heal" an Israel already torn to pieces and slain by the invading lions. This on one hand points to a resurrection from the dead. But it also speaks of God's ability to heal the apparently incurable. He was prepared to do that at the restoration, and perhaps at earlier points in Israel's history, including during Hosea's lifetime. One such time would have been during the apparent restoration in the time of Jeroboam II, who "restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the

plain". But He could not, because the extreme sin of Ephraim and Samaria was as it were revealed to Him. The long term effects of those sins, in terms of influence upon later generations, precluded the later healing of Israel. This is the nature of sin- it affects not only ourselves but others, including even generations after our death who suffer the result of our decisions.

The Hosea-Gomer parallel is clear. Hosea thought of just playing on, acting like so much had never happened... but then he remembered the reality of her past and present actions. We have a profound window onto the heart of God here. And that struggle occurs again later in Hosea, but then He finally accepts that for all His struggles, He cannot give them up- His love for them is too great.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

For they commit falsehood, and the thief enters in, and the gang of robbers ravages outside- This alludes to the huge sin of Hos. 6:9, which is not specifically

defined. However the language could be more figurative than literal. They robbed God (Mal. 3:8) by not truly and exclusively sacrificing to Him. Their entry into the sanctuary or temple under the guise of "falsehood", falsely claiming to worship Him, was in effect forcing entry and stealing. This is how seriously God views our relationship with Him and doing of mere rituals- if we are not exclusively His. That principle remains to this day.

The allusion in Hos. 4:2; 6:9; 7:1,4 is clearly to breaking of the ten commandments. These formed the basis of the old covenant. They had broken that covenant by doing these things, just as Gomer had. But the point was that a new covenant was being proposed to Gomer / Israel, seeing they had broken the old covenant- not simply in the sense of disobeying its terms, but thereby they had broken that covenant. It was no more. Just as Gomer's adultery had broken the marriage.

Hos 7:2 *They don't consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness-* The state of the heart is of critical importance to God. There is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Israel's lack of self-examination is quite a theme; see on :9. AVmg. is correct "they say not to their heart"; self talk is of the essence to God. There was no introspection, no real self dialogue; just as Gomer hooned around to different men, suppressing the voice of conscience, never deeply thinking nor engaging in self dialogue.

Now their own deeds have engulfed them; they are ever before My face- See on :4. Human sin remains "ever" before God; as noted above, the passage of time doesn't somehow remove sin. And their come days of judgment, even in this life, when the cumulative weight and moment of those sins engulf a person. And yet despite this, Hosea will conclude with God protesting His eternal love for Israel.

Hos 7:3 *They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies-* The "they" refers therefore not to the political leadership. It could be the priesthood that is in view, but the "all" of :4 seems to suggest that it was the common people. They were "all adulterers". "Lies" could refer to their idols (as in Is. 44:20). The peoples' idolatry and apostasy encouraged their rulers in the same. See on :7.

Hos 7:4 *They are all adulterers. They are burning like an oven-* "Burning" refers to their adultery, which was exemplified in Hosea's experience with his wife. The reality was that Gomer was sexually addicted, burnt up by her lust- as Jerusalem was to be burnt in fire because of the burning of her list. Gomer was a prostitute before her marriage, after her marriage she was an adulteress. Consider the language used about her / Israel: "committed whoredom continually" (Hos. 4:18), "the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them" (Hos. 5:4), "adulterers as an oven... hot as an oven" (Hos. 7:4,7), a woman even paying lovers to sleep with her, using Hosea's money (Hos. 8:9 cp. Hos. 2:8), although she had other lovers who gave her gifts to sleep with them (Hos. 2:12), "they sin more and more" (Hos. 13:2). This is the language of addiction. Gomer was a sex addict. Like Israel, she didn't consider in her heart that Hosea / God remembered / felt all her wickedness (7:2). She thought, as addicts do, that others are as insensitive as they are.

That the baker stops stirring, from the kneading of the dough, until it is leavened- GNB "Like the fire in an oven, which is not stirred by the baker until the dough is ready to bake". A baker doesn't keep stirring up the embers until the dough is ready.

But this baker stirs up the fire all the time, he is so consumed with burning, then goes to sleep because he is drunk (see on :6), and the oven catches alight (:7) and the cake is ruined (:8). Perhaps Hosea was a baker.

Another reading is that just as the baker rests from the kneading of the dough until it leavens, when he can bake it, so these men planned evil, slept on it, and got up and did it. Mic. 2:1 says the same: "Woe to those who plan iniquity and work evil on their beds; when the morning lights, they do it". Or "stops stirring" can be "ceases from kindling". The idea would then be "when the oven has reached a certain heat, and then he leaves the fire to smoulder, till the fermentation of the dough is complete, and a fresh heating is necessary. So after passion has once been gratified, it smoulders for a time, but is afterwards kindled to a greater heat than before". This matches Gomer's sexual insatiability, typical of how the flesh is never gratified.

Hos 7:5 *On the day of our king, the princes made him sick with the heat of wine so that he joined his hand with mockers*- The "day of our king" may refer to his birthday. Perhaps Hosea is commenting upon a drunken birthday party which resulted in the king making an agreement with "mockers". "Our king" reflects Hosea's continued identity with his sinful, wayward people; the very opposite of the guilt by association mindset which seeks to separate from and shun sinners. Or "The day" may refer to the day of the King's coronation. Perhaps Jeroboam's coronation descended into a drinking party. It could also refer to the day of the king's death. Hosea prophesied just as Israel were about to go into captivity, and we read of the murders of their last few kings in quick succession (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah and Pekah, 2 Kings 15:8-31). Here in Hos. 7:3-7 we may have allusion to the murder of one of them. Probably Pekahiah, who was murdered in his palace by his military commander Pekah (2 Kings 15:25). "Mockers" or scorers are in view when Isaiah, contemporary with Hosea, calls the politicians of Judah 'men of scorn' (Is. 28:14).

Hos 7:6 *For they have prepared their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait. Their baker sleeps all the night- in the morning it burns as a flaming fire*- The earlier allusions to drunkenness suggest that this baker slept because he was drunk, and the fire in his oven destroyed his bread; see on :4. This fire or burning represented their hearts; and we noted on :4 that their burning represented their lust. Those who "lie in wait" could refer to the enemies or assassins poised to strike. "The baker" would then be one of the kings of Judah or Israel who led to the burning of Jerusalem; Zedekiah is spoken of by Jeremiah in these terms. But the essential problem was in their hearts.

Hos 7:7 *They are all hot as an oven, and devour their judges. All their kings have fallen. There is no one among them who calls to Me*- The "they" in view appear to be the common people. This would continue the theme noted on :3; that the people were influencing the leadership to sin, rather than vice versa. Hosea spoke at a time when at least four kings had been murdered in succession, and "all" the kings in the royal line were dead. This was because of their burning in lust (see on :4). The murder of kings resulted from their unbridled minds.

Hos 7:8 *Ephraim, he mixes himself among the nations*- A reference perhaps to Israel's intermarriage with the Gentiles even whilst living in the land. Their exile to those lands therefore was a judgment which was really just a continuation of their own chosen path. Sin so often is its own punishment.

Ephraim is a pancake not turned over- The idea is as the Geneva Bible: "Baked on one side and raw on the other". See on :4.

Hos 7:9 *Strangers have devoured his strength, and he doesn't realize it-* Just as Gomer's lovers devoured her wealth, the wealth Hosea had given her from his life savings. The Gentiles "devoured" Israel and Judah when they attacked them; but this, again (see on :8) was but a continuation of their own chosen path. This comment of Hosea's also surely refers to how Menahem and Pekah paid huge sums of money to get their invaders to turn away from them (as noted in :11)- instead of turning to Yahweh. So these Gentile "strangers" would be the likes of Hazael, Benhadad, Pul and Tiglath Pileser.

Indeed, gray hairs are here and there on him, and he doesn't realize it- Israel's lack of perception is often pointed out; see on :2. They looked in the mirror, but refused to see their true image- a bald old man with a head sprinkled with a few grey hairs.

Hos 7:10 *The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to Yahweh their God, nor seek Him, for all this-* In :9 the analogy of a mirror has been used; Israel looked in the mirror but refused to notice their grey hairs, the sign that the end was drawing near. Their pride also was surely visible to them, testifying against them in the Divine court case. But they turned away from the mirror and refused to repent and turn to Yahweh, just as our self-examination can be just a momentary few moments. It is the standing before the cross of Christ which elicits the most powerful self examination.

Hos 7:11 *Ephraim is like an easily deceived dove, without understanding. They call to Egypt; they hop to Assyria-* This was what was criticized in :9- Menahem and Pekah, probably along with Hezekiah, paying money to Gentiles to save them. "Without heart" or "understanding" again emphasizes that they had no heart for God, as we will see in :14. Having a heart for God was and is the essence of it all- it is a question of whether we have His Spirit in our spirit. This is the picture of Gomer, running from one man to another, serving as cult prostitute for multiple idols. Superficial, refusing to stop and consider, doing what feels and seems good for the moment- and ignoring the huge love of God for her, represented by Hosea's love.

Our instinctive tendency is to rely upon human strength in time of trouble, to take the insurance policies of the world, to do what seems the humanly sensible thing to do, to take humanly wise precautions. If a person does that and also proclaims a trust in God, we tend to think that's fair enough. But Hosea absolutely lambasts Israel for trusting in political alliances. He calls them a silly dove, fluttering between Assyria and Egypt. Hosea seriously advocated a national defence policy of total trust upon Yahweh, and nothing else. What he was suggesting was against every human instinct. But the spirit of the prophets was to live and proclaim life to be lived in a counter-instinctive way, to do what seems humanly foolish, because of our faith. We have ample opportunity to show that spirit of the prophets, in a society which increasingly seeks to insure and re-insure itself against every possible 'act of God'. Yet Hosea went even beyond all this- he spoke of how Israel would be left "without a king" (Hos. 3:4), and that the ruling dynasty would be overthrown. This would've been seen as seditious and revolutionary, a desire to overthrow the King.

Hos 7:12 *When they go, I will spread My net on them-* Their trusting in human strength, like a dove flying off to Egypt and Assyria, was what provoked God's

judgment of them. And yet we all so easily do this. For in the figure, He caught them in the net whilst they were in flight.

I will bring them down like the birds of the sky. I will chastise them- Chastisement is language which carries with it the hope of correction. Although God would catch the Israel of that moment in a net and bring them down, He sees "Israel" His people on a collective level, outside the time-space construct. His motivation of 'chastising' them through the suffering of one generation was therefore in hope that later generations would learn. "Bring them down" alludes to how the fowler brought down a net hung on a pole, with the captured birds within it.

As their congregation has heard- From Hosea's public proclamation of these prophecies to the congregation of Israel.

Hos 7:13 *Woe to them! For they have wandered from Me. Destruction to them! For they have trespassed against Me. Though I would redeem them, yet they have spoken lies against Me-* As Gomer lied to Hosea despite the fact he had redeemed her (Hos. 3:2), so Israel despised God's redemptive love for them. Their professions of loyalty to Him were lies, as :14 will exemplify (Ps. 78:36). If we don't mean the words of our prayers said and hymns sung, we are doing the same to God.

"Destruction" is what God's people had done to each other by not forgiving debt, talking harshly and abusing each other with injustice (s.w. Is. 59:7; Jer. 6:7; Ez. 45:9). Their "destruction" was again a judgment of themselves by themselves. Likewise they "wandered" from God to others, and so their judgment was to "wander" among the Gentiles in their dispersion (s.w. Hos. 9:17). Their wandering was in going to Egypt and Assyria for help (:12); they therefore were sent into Assyria in exile.

The Hebrew for "redeem" is literally 'to sever'. By being intimate with the world, we are denying God's redemption of us; both that historically achieved on the cross, or in the Passover lamb redeeming Israel from Egypt, and also that final redemption which is potentially possible for us. Or we have the same idea as in :1. God, like Hosea, thinks of redeeming His woman... but decides not to, at this point, because their protestations of loyalty to Him in :14 are insincere. But finally He will decide to redeem them by sovereign grace alone.

Hos 7:14 *They haven't cried to Me with their heart, but they howl on their beds-* Perhaps they really did howl to God on their beds, as a desperately sick person does. But even that howl to God was not from their heart, and so God would not respond. Here again we see the critical importance of the heart. We can pray, even howl to God, not just in church but from our own bed- and yet not pray from the heart.

They assemble themselves for grain and new wine. They turn away from Me- The peopled synagogued or assembled themselves before God to pray for corn and wine, the blessing for obedience. But like Gomer with Hosea, they turned away from God. The juxtaposition is intentional and is a favourite device of Hosea's prophecies. They howled even privately on their beds to God- but not from their heart. They begged Him to take away drought and famine, to give them grain and wine- whilst turning away from Him to other gods. This potential for dualism is a sad feature of human nature.

Or "they assemble themselves" can mean "they store up". The idea would then be 'They have many granaries of corn; therefore, they turn away and rebel against Me'.

Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; Gomer like Israel, turned against her husband the more he gave her. But LXX has "they cut themselves", as Baal worshippers did in order to plead with their god, as on Mount Carmel. They were thus crying both to Yahweh and to Baal. And this was not acceptable to God for Him to redeem them (:13).

Hos 7:15 *Though I have taught and strengthened their arms, yet they plot evil against Me-* Hosea has pointed out the dualism within their approach to God, begging Him for blessings of corn and wine, just as Gomer did to Hosea, whilst at the same time turning away from Him to other gods. And God says that even as babies, whilst He taught them to walk and strengthened their arms by exercise (the figure is repeated in Hos. 11:3), yet even at that young age they plotted evil against God their loving Father. Or perhaps the idea is that now in their maturity they refused to remember God's tender grace to them in the past, both personally and on a national level in the wilderness, and plotted evil against Him. They of course would have denied making such plots; but their plans to get help from Egypt and Assyria were "evil" and were "against" God.

To seek human help rather than Divine appears a mere common failure. But Hosea uses the same Hebrew words to describe his wife's desertion ["she walked / departed from me", Hos. 2:7,15] as he does to describe the embassy to Assyria as departing / walking there (Hos. 7:11). To seek human help in distress is to be unfaithful to our God. And yet when health fails, a lump appears, the car won't start, we lose our job... to whom do we instinctively turn? Here is the huge relevance of all this to modern humanity, who have striven to insure and protect themselves against calamity to an unprecedented extent.

Hos 7:16 *They return, but not to the Most High-* Just as they howled to God in prayer and through attending religious meetings, yet they did so whilst turning away from God (see on :14). Their return or repentance was not genuine; they indeed had the motions of returning to God, but such feelings are not of themselves repentance. This is a chilling warning to us as we ask ourselves whether our self-examination and repentance is in fact genuine, or just the external appearance of it in time of need. Likewise Israel's return from captivity was indeed a return, but not to God; just as Gomer returned to Hosea when in need, but not from her heart.

Or the reference may be to their return to Egypt for safety there, rather than trusting in God.

They are like a faulty bow- Ancient bows had the string as a C-shape, curving towards the archer. If misfired, then the string came powerfully back against the archer. Their 'return' was as if God had fired them as an arrow back toward Judah. But the arrow didn't fly and the string lashed back against Him. His efforts to get them to return, like Hosea's to bring about Gomer's return, badly backfired. And He was personally shocked and hurt.

Their princes will fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue- This continues the theme of God uttering apparently extreme judgments against His people for things such as 'having a rant' which we might consider surface level failure. Or it could be that quietly sending princes with a charmingly worded message to Egypt for help, as in 2 Kings 17:4, was seen as raging against God,

Perhaps there is a prophecy here against Jonathan son of Kareah and all the officers of the armies who returned to Egypt.

This will be their derision in the land of Egypt- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory*. They would return to Egypt and be derided there. God says this clearly in Hos. 8:13; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn.

HOSEA CHAPTER 8

Hos 8:1 *Put the trumpet to your lips!*- The trumpets were blown to warn of invaders; I suggested on Hos. 5:7 that Hosea's audience had then but a month to repent. The invaders were upon them. There was an urgency in this call to repentance, as there is for us. For "the judge stands before the door", now as never before in human history.

Something like an eagle is over Yahweh's house- The invasion was imminent, "an eagle" giving the idea of rapidity (Dt. 28:49; Hab. 1:8). They had flown as a dove to Assyria for help, and the Assyrians had returned as an eagle. But there was still chance to repent and change the outcome, so that the eagle didn't swoop; see on :8. We continually get the impression that the invasion was about to happen; the word "now" occurs often, as in :8. God was teetering on the edge of bringing it... throughout Hosea's ministry. Just as Hosea was on the brink of divorcing Gomer, but didn't. Because love won out over necessary judgment and legitimate anger.

Because they have broken My covenant, and rebelled against My law- The law of Moses was God's marriage covenant with Israel. As Gomer broke her marriage covenant with Hosea by adultery, so Israel broke the covenant they had entered with God at Sinai (Dt. 29:12). But we should not conclude too easily that breaking the letter of that law was thereby breaking the covenant. Hosea never condemns Israel for a lack of technical, casuistic obedience. Even though the ten tribe kingdom clearly were not legally obedient to the Mosaic law. Instead he repeatedly accuses them of not being with God in their heart. It is our hearts, the overall direction of our lives, which is the issue- rather than particular stellar examples of individual acts of obedience or disobedience. We note the constant condemnation of Israel for unfaithfulness to the covenant- individual sins are one thing, but breaking covenant is quite another. Failure within the covenant is assumed by God, it seems. But breaking the covenant is to walk away from His love. Hence His demand for our *hesed*, covenant love, loyalty, faithfulness to and recognition of the covenant.

Hos 8:2 *They cry to Me, 'My God, how we know You!'*- See on 6:6 *The knowledge of God*. Hos. 5:4 explains why: "the spirit of prostitution is within them, and they don't know Yahweh". It was finally God's dream that "you shall know no god but Me, for besides Me there is no saviour" (Hos. 13:4). "Saviour" is 'yasha', from whence Yahoshua, Yah saves, Jesus. Knowing God involves knowing Him as saviour; and a husband is to be trusted as a saviour: "the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the head of the church- himself being the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). "Saviour", "king" and even "your God" were terms which in Hebraic thought were titles for a husband. And yet Israel like Gomer looked to other gods and nations as their saviour. The New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as our "only saviour", Yahshua, Yah's

salvation. It is knowing / experiencing Yah's salvation in the Lord Jesus which is to know Him. But Israel like Gomer, saw their salvation as coming from many sources- various Baals, Assyria, Egypt, Yahweh etc. As Gomer claimed to "know" / be in relationship with Hosea, so did Israel with God. They drew near with their lips, but their heart was far from Him (Is. 29:13). Israel prayed intensely to God, but not from their heart (see on Hos. 7:14). Prayer alone is not enough; we can pray, but not from the heart. Elijah prayed within his prayer- from his heart, beyond the words (see on James 5:17). And likewise knowing *about* God is not the same as knowing God. The very knowledge *about* Him of itself can lead us to assume that therefore we know Him in relationship; but this crucial difference needs to be realized by us. And the more knowledge we accrue, the more likely we are to be tempted to assume this is enough. In this lies the problem of defining fellowship with God on the basis of a set of theological propositions; fellowship / knowledge / relationship with God is a moral and not a solely theological issue.

Hos 8:3 *Israel has cast off that which is good. The enemy will pursue him*- This is God's answer to their prayer of :2. He says they have cast Him off, just as the Lord will reply to those who knock on the door at the last day by saying that He never knew them, i.e. they never 'knew' Him (Mt. 7:23). The LXX has "they have pursued an enemy"; by going to Assyria for help (:9), like Gomer chasing after her lovers, they were chasing after those who would later be their enemy. And by so doing they were casting off relationship with God who would do them good rather than evil; for He is "God who is good, and is always doing good" (Ps. 119:68). There is an ambiguity in the text- they pursued their enemies, and the enemies pursued them, as threatened in the Mosaic curses for disobedience. By chasing after the Assyrians for help, they brought about the Assyrians chasing them.

Hos 8:4 *They have set up kings, but not by Me. They have made princes, and I didn't approve*- Jeroboam became king of the ten tribes after the revolt against the house of David and Judah. There is an allusion to his calves in :5. This was not God's will; and yet He also brought the situation about as judgment upon His people, and it was according to His word that Jeroboam became king (1 Kings 11:37). Likewise it was not God's wish that Jerusalem be destroyed; and yet it was His prophetic word which brought it about. If we will not do God's will, then He propels us further in that path; there is both an evil and a holy spirit which alike proceed from the Lord. But His propulsion of evil men in their path does not mean that He approves their actions. Later God will comment that He gave them a king in His anger, and took him away in His wrath. But this was "not by Me". He didn't "approve"; but like the Father to the prodigal, He gives man what he wants. Because of love... just as Hosea would've done to Gomer.

Being pursued by enemies is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:36). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant (see on :1). But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Of their silver and their gold they have made themselves idols, that they may be cut off- As Gomer used Hosea's wealth to hire lovers and serve idols. They "cast off" relationship with God (:3), and He in turn cut them off. The term for "cut off" is used of cutting / making a covenant; and they had despised God's exclusive covenant and cut covenants with the Assyrians (s.w. Hos. 10:4; 12:1). Those covenants involved agreements to worship the idols of their lovers / helpers. The silver and gold they paid

to the Gentile armies required them to make the idols of those peoples (2 Kings 16:17).

Hos 8:5 *Let Samaria throw out his calf idol!*- The calf idols of Jeroboam were to be destroyed anyway by the invaders (:6), so they were to throw them down now. We feel Hosea's personal anger reflecting that of the God whose Spirit was inspiring him. We too need to throw away our idols for they shall be destroyed anyway by the Lord's coming. Ahaz had 'thrown out' the vessels of the temple (2 Chron. 29:19 s.w.); Hosea was calling for a radical inversion of values. The call of the prophetic word is no less radical in our day. Again we see an intentional ambiguity in the Hebrew- it could read (as AV) that Samaria's calf had led to her being thrown out / cast off by God; but that would not be the case if Samaria threw out her calf idol.

My anger burns against them! How long will it be until they are capable of purity?- The existence of the calf idols meant that purity was impossible for them. "Purity" has sexual overtones, and we again note that Gomer's impurity was the basis of Israel's idolatry. But even in this we see God's power to restore; sexual impurity can be read as making the offender permanently impure. But God like Hosea could restore her to a former innocence, by the grace of His imputed righteousness and cleansing spirit of forgiveness. And in Christ we likewise can become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), with the psychological effects of past sins dealt with and cleansed in God's sight. Again we see a juxtaposition- God's anger burnt, and yet at the same time He wished ["How long...?"] for their repentance and restoration. Hosea felt the same about Gomer.

AV "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" is not simply Divine frustration, but the expression of His hope- that they will at some point come to the innocency of a young woman totally devoted to her husband. This was what God was willing to do for them psychologically through the gift of His Spirit that would accompany the new covenant. And those who receive it today likewise can return to innocency, despite the most mentally profligate lives and minds. Cleansing is absolutely possible. "Innocency" is s.w. "guiltless". Even the guilt of the past could be removed. But this is only possible through God's Spirit. The Lord Jesus as the guilt offering (Is. 53) can as Paul says, cleanse the conscience from past sins / dead works. This is something which human forgiveness can't do. And perhaps that's why we struggle with it. Israel like Gomer had "the spirit of prostitution", a mind addled with addiction; and that could be cleansed to "innocency". Truly a born again virgin. But this innocency / being guiltless is only attained through confession of sin. And Israel / Gomer refused. Jer. 2:35 uses the same word for "innocent": "Yet you said, 'I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned away from me'. Behold, I will judge you, because you say, 'I have not sinned'".

The Divine "how long...?" matches the same words recorded as being the feelings of His faithful throughout history. Here we see the mutuality possible between God and man. God entertained this strong hope for Israel whilst in the previous clause having stated that "My anger burns against them". So often we read these same Hebrew words, "Yahweh's anger was kindled". For all time, we see that God for sure has emotion and passion. Often we read these words of God's anger when His covenant was broken. And Israel like Gomer had broken the covenant. He says that "the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you and He would destroy you quickly" (Dt. 7:4 and often; over 50 times in the OT we read that Yahweh's anger was kindled). If His anger is kindled, He wants to destroy His people suddenly. "The wrath of Yahweh was kindled against His people so that He hated / abhorred His

inheritance" (Ps. 106:40). Just as Hosea is saying; "I hated them... will love them no more". But here we read that His anger was kindled, but He desperately longed for the day when they would attain to "innocency". He had those feelings at the very same time as He wanted to destroy them. Just as Hosea understandably oscillated between such feelings for Gomer. And this is how God feels over every single one of us. The on balance position is that indeed God loves us and awaits our repentance and return to innocency. But that position is arrived at through such a painful and tortuous path.

Hos 8:6 *For this is even made in Israel! The workman made it, and it is no God-* The true God is not made with hands. The characteristic of idols is that they are humanly created. God alone is uncreate; but there is a constant tension within us between wanting to worship human works, and worshipping God. The desire to worship is coded within our natures; but it is for us to decide what we worship.

Indeed, the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces- Therefore, they were to destroy it now (:5). One reason why Israel wouldn't destroy the calves was because they were such a long standing symbol of their argument with Judah; it would be rather like spitting upon the flag of one's birth nation. But loyalty to God ought to have been stronger than these cultural, socio-historical loyalties.

Hos 8:7 *For they sow the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind-* We would expect to read that they sowed to the flesh, and so of the flesh would reap a whirlwind of judgment (as in Gal. 6:8). But sowing to the flesh is sowing the wind. They were wasting their lives, as Gomer did, on wind, on light things of no eternal moment. And for that, would reap the whirlwind of judgment. This repeats the great prophetic theme- that what might appear of little consequence in secular terms will result in eternal judgment and even now provokes the wrath of God. We live in a world which as never before sows the wind, glorifying the inane, vapid and meaningless. Life and human personality is increasingly superficial, life is no more than a day at the races. Most are no different to the light hearted, empty headed Gomer who disregarded Hosea's great love and ran for this or that which offered immediate gratification and solution. "Wind" and "whirlwind" are related ideas; the "wind" of lighthearted thinking and living will gather together into a mighty whirlwind of judgment. Social media, art and entertainment are full of it. We can spend our hearts and our time on it- and reap the whirlwind. Whatever we do, we are sowing. All human thought, action and living is a sowing, and we shall one day reap accordingly. We can take no time out from this sowing; life, every moment of it and every thought, has eternal consequence. The things of God's ways are 'heavy' and not wind; the Hebrew word for "glory" is literally "weight". The things of the eternal weight of glory are being prepared for us now (2 Cor. 4:17). But Israel sowed the wind in their lives, and became themselves light, or vain and "worthless" (:8).

He has no standing grain; the stalk will yield no head of grain. If it does yield, strangers will swallow it up- Israel had sowed, but sowed the wind. No grain would therefore be found upon them. They were as stalks without any head of grain. Their prayers and ritual obediences were but a stalk. The fruit of the Spirit was lacking. Any apparent spiritual fruit they had would be the food of the Gentiles, and not unto God. But 'swallow up' really means 'to destroy'. They would be unable to spiritually cope with their judgment by the Gentiles, and any spirituality they might have developed

would be destroyed by it. As Hosea gave Gomer grain (Hos. 2:8), so God had enabled Israel to bear such fruit; but they had given it to the idols of the Gentiles.

Hos 8:8 *Israel is swallowed up*- Again, the present tenses are used about future events. The word of judgment had gone forth, it was as good as done; but in the gap between word and fulfilment, they could repent and change God's present reality. This is the time gap we too stand in, as Paul reasons in Romans. This gives intensity to our repentance and our grateful acceptance of the changed verdict. See on :1 and Hos. 6:5.

Now they are among the nations like a worthless thing- Israel were "worthless" in that they had sowed the wind, they had been "light" rather than "heavy" (:7). The same Hebrew term is used of Coniah in Jer. 22:28.

Hos 8:9 *For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers for himself*- Because they had sought help from Assyria, it was as if Assyria had already attacked and destroyed them (:8). As Gomer paid men for sex, so Ephraim hired "lovers", the help of flesh against their invaders. Menahem and Pekah paid huge sums of money to get their invaders to turn away from them (as noted in Hos. 7:11)- instead of turning to Yahweh. Quietly trusting in human help was for God- adultery. And this principle comes down hard upon us in our age, where savings and human security are perhaps the equivalent. Seeking this help was likened to being "a wild donkey wandering alone". The allusion may be to a donkey in heat, wandering around looking for a female to inseminate (as in Jer. 2:24 "a wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire. When she is in heat, who can turn her away?"). This would continue the connection between adultery / sexual infatuation and going to Assyria for help, instead of turning to God. The roaming donkey literally has wander lust. Israel weren't going after just one other god. There were various Baals (note the plural in Hos. 2:17), just as Gomer had many lovers rather than just one lover with whom she had an affair. Her sexual addiction therefore represents Israel's psychological obsession with having many gods. That there is only one true God was accepted in theory by them- only as much as Gomer claimed to be the wife of only one man. We see here how hard it was to believe in just one God, and that difficulty is perhaps reflected to this day in how man wishes to turn the one true God into a trinity. The judgment upon Israel was to wander in unfulfilled lust like a single wild ass in the wilderness- and this is the picture of being so alone in unfulfilment. It is the picture of the rejected, wandering alone in the darkness with no hand to hold.

Hos 8:10 *But although they sold themselves among the nations*- Like Gomer who paid men for sex, so Israel had given money to the nations around them for salvation (:9). But this was also a selling of herself; what she was given was apparent material support against her enemies. But what did Israel sell? What did Gomer sell? What does a prostitute sell? Her very self. Israel's inner heart was not with God, as Gomer's was not with Hosea. They gave it away to others. Anything less than a heart exclusively devoted to God is as prostitution. We therefore need to watch our heart, our mind, our spirit; for out of it are the issues of life eternal (Prov. 4:23). We need to ask whether the visual images and sounds and words we willingly subject ourselves to are going to help us maintain that heart for God.

I will now gather them; and they begin to waste away because of the oppression of the king of mighty ones- In the LXX there is a juxtaposition of ideas: "Therefore shall they be delivered to the nations: now I will receive them, and they shall cease a little to anoint a king and princes". Repeatedly, God's words of judgment contain within the same sentence or paragraph the promise of restoration. Those judgments were therefore not uttered in the blind anger of an offended deity. Yahweh was not like that. His love and pity are an intrinsic part of His anger with sin; "for the wrath of God is the love of God". The various aspects of our characters tend to manifest themselves at different times; one moment we are angry with someone, and then we cool down and pity them. But God is outside of time as we experience it; His characteristics are more holistically manifested, all articulated at the same time in His every word and action. According to the LXX, God's hope was that after "a little [time]" they would again choose a Messianic king and be received again by God, having been regathered by Him. This was Hosea's hope for Gomer. This is the two or three day period of Hos. 6:2 (see note there). But it didn't work out like that for Hosea with Gomer, neither did it for God at the time of the restoration, when most of His people preferred to remain in exile from Him.

Hos 8:11 *Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they became for him altars for sinning-* The more possibilities we give ourselves to sin, the more we will. This applies today in terms of what we watch and with whom we mix. This all began with Jeroboam saying that Israel could worship Yahweh at the calf idol altars, rather than going up to the Jerusalem temple. That multiplication of altars, just two to begin with, in turn multiplied, and became "sin" (1 Kings 12:30; 13:34). There was to be but one altar, and this was sternly emphasized (Dt. 12:5,6,13,14). God foresaw what would happen; the tendency would be to serve God as they thought and wanted, rather than as He wanted, and to mix idolatry with worshipping Him. This tendency to worship idols in the name of God is strong to this day- we may seek a better kitchen, a holiday home, a nicer car... supposedly in order to serve God. But after all those things do the Gentiles also seek.

Hos 8:12 *I wrote for him the many things of My law-* See on Hos. 6:6 *The knowledge of God*. I noted on :1 that the Mosaic law given at Sinai was the marriage covenant between God and Israel. As Gomer despised her marriage covenant with Hosea, so did Israel. "I wrote" is literally "I write"; the covenant was written in the handwriting of God. It could not have been a more intimate contract between God and Israel, and was as it were written for each member of Israel in an ongoing sense. "Many things" is the same word as "multiplied" in :11. They had many idols, whereas there were many things written in God's law. Their obedience to those many things was precluded by their many idols; as if each Divine commandment had an idol precluding obedience to it. His commandments are designed to help us not have idols; if we obey them, then we will not serve idols.

But they were regarded as a strange thing- The Hebrew would be better translated: "They were woven / turned into a foreign / Gentile / adulterous thing". This speaks of how they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh worship, claiming that their various idolatrous rituals were in fact obedience to God's commandments. Thus the "many things of My law" became parallel with their "many" idols (:11). And again we have to note that this is our tendency- to justify wrong behaviour, be it gossip or materialism, as some kind of service of God.

Hos 8:13 *As for the sacrifices of My offerings, they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but Yahweh doesn't accept them-* Israel didn't stop sacrificing to God, just as Gomer never ceased going through the motions of being married to Hosea. I noted on Hos. 7:14 that Israel prayed to God, even intensely, but their heart was not with them. Isaiah likewise condemns Israel for offering sacrifice whilst serving other gods. The motions of religious worship, attending meetings, sacrificing money, prayer to God... all this of itself is not what God seeks. Even fasting didn't make God "accept them" (Jer. 14:12 s.w.). It is not accepted if our hearts are not with Him. If we have not the spirit of Christ, we are none of His. The same word is used of how if the returned exiles rebuilt a temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48, then Yahweh would "accept" their offerings (Ez. 43:27); in this way He would "accept" the returned exiles as His people (Ez. 20:40,41 s.w.). Just as Hosea would have accepted back a repentant Gomer. But they didn't build as required, and despised the temple they did build, according to Haggai and Malachi. There is a desire to worship and to sacrifice coded into human beings, a desire to give to a good cause. But this is not the same as acceptable sacrifice. He has all material things and needs nothing. What He seeks is the sacrifice of a broken, humbled and repentant spirit. And that is rarely offered to Him.

The Hebrew can mean 'Let them slaughter the flesh and eat [it]'. As if to say, 'Why do I need them to bring them? Let them slaughter so that they have flesh to eat and eat them, for I do not desire them'.

Now He will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins- The words of Jer. 14:10. It's not clear who was quoting who, Hosea or Jeremiah; or it could be that God inspired them both with the same words at around the same time. As noted on Hos. 7:2, there is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Just as Hosea never forgot Gomer's betrayals, despite his love for her and desire to rebuild the relationship.

They will return to Egypt- They would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God says this clearly in Hos. 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. Just as Hosea oscillated between totally ending it with Gomer, even having her executed, and on the other hand, continuing to desperately love her and hope for her response.

Hos 8:14 *For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send a fire on his cities, and it will devour its fortresses-* Israel and Judah were zealously religious for Yahweh (see on :13). But they forgot their maker because they trusted in human fortifications for defence rather than God (Jer. 5:17); their heart was lifted up and therefore they forgot God (Hos. 13:6). Again, it was a question of the heart. They forgot God, their hearts were not with Him in daily life. Their technical obedience and religion were of no account compared to that. They kept parts of the Mosaic law (:13), and yet they "forgot the law of your God" (Hos. 4:6). External obedience is nothing if the covenant is not in

our hearts. Forgetting God is associated with adultery in Ez. 23:35; Hos. 2:13. "Palaces" here is also translated "temples", which were the source of their literal and spiritual adultery. That God is our maker ought to be an imperative to ever remember Him and not forget Him; our very bodies are witnesses to Him as we are created in His image (Dt. 32:15,18). This is where faith in the creation record strengthens our further faith in daily life; and vice versa.

HOSEA CHAPTER 9

Hos 9:1 *Don't rejoice in jubilation, Israel, like the other nations; for you were unfaithful to your God. You love the wages of a prostitute at every grain threshing floor-* Perhaps Hosea uttered this prophecy at some harvest festival. The "jubilation" was the joy of harvest, at the threshing floor (:2). Baal was a fertility cult. Blessings of good harvests, corn and wine, were promised to Israel for their loyalty to the covenant. But they prostituted themselves to Baal, trusting Baal for such harvests. And now like the other nations, in a year of good harvests, they joyfully thanked Baal. But the difference between them and the other nations was that they had thereby been maritally unfaithful to Yahweh. The apparent blessings of corn and wine were a reward not for their obedience to His covenant, but were the wages received for their prostitution with Baal. Hosea experienced the same with Gomer, who received payment in terms of food and clothing from her lovers, when these were what Hosea was obliged to give her as his covenanted wife.

Hos 9:2 *The threshing floor and the winepress won't feed them, and the new wine will fail her-* Threshing floor and winepress are also figures for judgment. By rejoicing in the apparent fertility given by the Baal cult, probably sleeping with the cult prostitutes on the threshing floors, Israel were living out their own judgment. They would be threshed / judged for this.

Hos 9:3 *They won't dwell in Yahweh's land; but Ephraim will return to Egypt-* They would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God says this clearly in Hos. 8:13. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. See on :6.

Another possibility is that returning to Egypt is meant to be understood as God saying that just as He had brought them out of Egypt and entered a marriage covenant with them at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1), now He was sending them back to their land of origin- which was Egypt rather than Canaan. He was divorcing them, sending away His wife. So often in Hosea we read as if God / Hosea is on the very verge of divorcing Israel / Gomer, and is making a literally last minute appeal to her to change. Thus we keep reading that the invasion is about to happen, the eagle is circling and about to dive. But Hosea lived with Gomer for at least 50 years. He is never recorded as divorcing her. Although he so often says he is about to. So we have here an extraordinary window onto the feelings of God in the run up to Israel being sent into captivity in Assyria, and Judah in Babylon. This was the culmination of a heart wrenching period of teetering on the edge of the divorce. And even then, His actions,

like Hosea's, were studded with dreams of reconcillation. In no way did He act with raw, offended anger that is the dominant emotion rather than love. Absolutely not.

And they will eat unclean food in Assyria- God confirms men in the downward path they choose. Israel didn't want to be obedient to God's laws, and so they would go to Assyria where they would have to break those laws. Both an evil and holy spirit come from God, confirming us in the paths we choose. The next verse continues this theme.

Hos 9:4 *They won't pour out wine offerings to Yahweh, neither will they be pleasing to Him-* As noted on :3, Israel didn't want to be obedient to God, and so He sent them into a situation in exile where they could not properly offer to Him, as they had no temple nor acceptable altar. God confirms sinners in the downward spiral they themselves desire. The ten tribes had declined to go up to the Jerusalem temple and now in captivity they would be left without that possibility at all. If we don't take our spiritual opportunities, they are taken away from us; it's a case of use it or lose it. Their offerings were not "pleasing" to God whilst within the land (Jer. 6:20; Mal. 3:4 s.w.); and they would now be put into a position where their offerings in exile could not "please" Him.

Their sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat of it will be polluted. Their bread will merely be for their hunger, it will not come with acceptance as an offering into the house of Yahweh- "Bread of mourners", "like food eaten at funerals" (GNB) is literally the bread of *aven*, of sin, of idolatry. Their eating pagan sacrifices in the name of Yahweh worship had amounted to this; and their attempts to worship Yahweh in captivity would be seen likewise. The ten tribes hadn't wanted to go up to "the house of Yahweh"; and so their attempts to consider that somehow their sacrifices offered in exile came into His house were not going to be acceptable. All too late they would wish to somehow have fellowship with His house; but too late. This is the tragedy of the rejected, that they will want all too late to enter God's house, knocking on the closed door.

Hos 9:5 *What will you do in the day of solemn assembly, and in the day of the feast of Yahweh?*- As noted on :3 and :4, in captivity they would have no opportunity to acceptably keep the feasts. They had no temple nor functioning priesthood. But this was because they themselves had sacrificed to Baal in the name of Yahweh worship. "The day of solemn assembly" may refer to the day of atonement. They had not wanted to keep it as intended whilst they could, and in exile it wouldn't be possible.

Hos 9:6 *For, behold, they have marched off to destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them-* The references to death at Memphis in Egypt sound as if for sure, God would send them into captivity in Egypt. The GNB has: "When the disaster comes and the people are scattered, the Egyptians will gather them up- gather them for burial there at Memphis!". This was clearly stated in Hos. 7:16; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He says that they will not return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn. We note the past tenses, when the threatened captivity was yet future. God's word of judgment is sure, but in the gap between statement and fulfilment, we can repent and change it. This is the intensity of the human moment in which we live hour by hour.

Nettles will possess their pleasant things of silver, thorns will come up in their tents- This may refer to the high places and tents set up for pagan rites on the high

places of Israel. They would be abandoned and overgrown with nettles and thorns, the sign of the curse for sin in Eden.

Hos 9:7 The days of visitation have come, the days of reckoning have come. Israel will consider the prophet to be a fool, and the inspired man to be insane- They considered Hosea to be mad. And indeed the stress within Hosea was so enormous that he may indeed have had some kind of breakdown; not only from his relationship with Gomer, but because he had real insight into God's feelings for Israel. The psychological strengthening of the prophets (see on Ez. 2:4-6) was absolutely necessary- for no human being can live in a constant state of inspiration without breaking. The composer Tchaikovsky commented: "If that condition of mind and soul, which we call inspiration, lasted long without intermission, no artist could survive it. The strings would break and the instruments be shattered into fragments" (Rosa Newmarch, *The Life And Letters Of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (New York: Vienna House, 1973 ed.) pp. 274,275). The whole tremendous experience of having God's mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There's a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (e.g. Jer. 29:24,26; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them... would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there's no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

Because of the abundance of your sins, and because your hostility is great- Like Gomer with Hosea, Israel would never have considered themselves hostile to God. But this is how He sees our behaviour. But perhaps there was indeed some level of anger with God, and anger with Hosea by Gomer. Like addicts, she came to hate Hosea, the very one who enabled her as a person, who alone had loved her truly (9:7,8). And yet Hosea loved her to the end. All this is of course a simple warning against sexual addiction, which is one of the most untabulated and significant addictions in our society. But for a man to love a woman like this is a marvellous picture of God's love for His Israel, both then and now.

Hos 9:8 A prophet watches over Ephraim with my God. A fowler's snare is on all of his paths, and hostility in the house of his God- The GNB captures the sense: "God has sent me as a prophet to warn his people Israel. Yet wherever I go, you try to trap me like a bird. Even in God's Temple the people are the prophet's enemies". God watches over His word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). But He did so through Hosea and the prophets. Yet the people tried to trap him in his words and were openly hostile to him in the temple courts- just as happened to the Lord. Hostility in the temple would have come from the two tribe kingdom of Judah; despite the Mosaic rituals being observed there, the people opposed God's word as represented by Hosea.

Hos 9:9 They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah- The sin of Gibeah was the rape and murder of the Levites' concubine, and the Levite sending parts of her body throughout Israel (Jud. 19). The sin of Gibeah was performed by the Benjamites, and Hosea has just lamented the opposition he faced in the Jerusalem temple at the hands of Judah and Benjamin (:8). It was the priests with whom Gomer was sleeping; the very people who were murdering Yahweh's prophets, Hosea's

brethren. And yet he still desperately loved her, as God loved those who slew His Son.

Hosea twice claims that the "sin of Gibeah" was the sin of all Israel: "These men are steeped in corruption as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins... Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel. There they stand. Shall not war overtake the guilty in Gibeah?" (Hos. 9:8,9; 10:9). Yet the sin of Gibeah historically was the sin of the men of Gibeah, defended from judgment by the tribe of Benjamin. But Hosea says that all Israel sinned as the men of Gibeah did. And that is what the Judges record brings out in Jud. 19-21. The tribes who judged Gibeah for their sin also suffered judgment- because in essence they were equally guilty. See on Jud. 20:24.

He will remember their iniquity, He will punish them for their sins- As noted on Hos. 7:2; 8:13, there is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. This is a basic theme in Hosea, arising no doubt from Hosea's noticing and remembering all of Gomer's unfaithfulness, even though she thought he hadn't noticed.

Hos 9:10 *I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at its first season-* God fell in love with Israel in the wilderness, according to Ez. 16 and Jer. 2. The parallel is with how Hosea had indeed fallen in love with the prostitute Gomer, and had seen her "as" perfect and wonderful- which is what love does. Grapes are not found naturally in the wilderness, that is not their normal habitat; the idea is that God saw them as something they naturally were not. This seems to imply that in the same way as God fell in love with Israel in the wilderness, even though they were worshipping idols even then, so Hosea did actually find Gomer attractive initially. The emphasis is upon how God "found" and "saw" them to be attractive at Sinai, and entered into a marriage covenant with them. But as Ez. 20 reminds us, they carried the idols of Egypt with them at this time, carrying the star of Remphan and the tabernacle of Moloch with them along with that of Yahweh. But despite that, God imputed righteousness to them and saw them as wonderfully attractive, just as Num. 23:21; 24:6 say that God did not see iniquity in Israel but saw them as beautiful trees. The idea of imputed righteousness was there in the Old Testament; it is part of love. In Hosea's terms, God says He saw them as grapes and ripe figs, as if they had spiritual fruit when they did not. Grapes and figs don't grow in the desert; but God saw them like this. We struggle to believe that God and His Son really see us so positively, "unblameable... without spot... in His sight". But this is what faith in the love of God is all about.

God 'finding' Israel could mean, as suggested above, that this is how they appeared to Him, how He saw them. But it could equally mean that God searched for them and found them. God's search for man is a repeated theme of the prophets. "He found him in a desert land... He encircled him, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Dt. 32:10). "I said, Here am I, here am I... I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people... I called, no one answered" (Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). "I have found David my servant" (Ps. 89:20). God is in search of man. If we are in search of Him, there is an electric moment when His search for us and ours for Him come to meeting point. And yet in another sense, we don't so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. Every man and woman is somehow a life

“bound in the bundle of living in the care of the Lord” (2 Sam. 25:29). We come to realize that before we were formed in the womb, God knew us (Jer. 1:5).

But they came to Baal Peor, and consecrated themselves to the shameful thing- I noted above that God saw Israel encamped in beauty and without sin, and the visions of Balaam state this clearly. But immediately after those visions, Israel sinned with Baal Peor and joined themselves sexually and spiritually to Baal (Num. 23:28; 25:18; 31:16). So Balaam's visions may be in view in Hosea's words. Israel were now being judged for the sin at and with Baal Peor, and we recall the comment of Josh. 22:17, that “we are not cleansed from the iniquity of Peor even until this day”. This was because the essence of that sin was continued in subsequent generations, including Hosea's. Despite God looking so positively at Israel, imputing righteousness to them, yet they prostituted themselves to Baal and slept with the Moabite Baal prostitutes. This of course was reflecting exactly the situation between Hosea and Gomer.

And became abominable like that thing which they so loved- We become like what we worship. And we have a desire to worship coded within our natures. We must therefore make a conscious election as to what we will worship, knowing that we shall become like it in due course. We become like what and whom we love. If we are transfixed by the gracious salvation that is in the Lord, we will become like Him in thought and deed.

9:11 *As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird-* There was a tremendous sensitivity in Hosea to both God and to the sin of His people, honed and developed by his own relationship with Gomer. At the start of Hosea's prophecy, Israel were prosperous. They worshipped Yahweh, and assumed He was with them. And yet Hosea discounts their worship of Yahweh as being effectively idolatry. Time and again Hosea accuses Israel of idolatry, using words to describe their idolatry which are word plays on language associated with Yahweh. He speaks of their *kabod* [glory] (Hos. 9:11; 10:5)- a word usually used about the glory of Yahweh. They worshipped *lo 'al* (Hos. 7:16)- and he uses *al* to refer to Yahweh in Hos. 11:7. They worshipped *sor* (Hos. 9:13)- the same consonants as *sur*, the “rock” of Yahweh (Dt. 32:31). He calls Yahweh *qados* (Hos. 11:9), but they worshipped *qedosim* (Hos. 12:1). We tend to assume that Hosea's denunciation of idolatry meant that Israel worshipped both Yahweh and various other images and idols of their pagan gods. But that seems to be an over-simplification. Archaeologists have actually not found much evidence of such gods as stand alone entities. Summarizing much research, Cogan concludes: “There is no evidence of Assyrian interference in the Israelite cult prior to the 720 BCE annexation of Samaria [after Hosea's time]... Israel was free of any cultic obligation” (M. Cogan, *Imperialism And Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974) pp. 103,104). And yet, Hosea speaks for all the world as if there were shrines etc. to other gods all over the place. My conclusion is that the idols, shrines etc. to which Hosea refers were therefore actually understood by Israel as a form of Yahweh worship. But he points out to them that actually, their worship of Yahweh is a form of idolatry. And all this has relevance to us. For actually things like daily Bible reading, attending church, going through the formalities of a religion, can become a form of fetishism rather than parts of the dynamic, Spirit filled life which they ought to be a vital part of. Worshipping Yahweh in the “high places”, i.e. the pagan shrines, was Israel's besetting sin. It's rather like the way they turned the bronze snake of the wilderness into an idol. They, like us, never simply turned their back on the true Way. Rather did

they mix it with the way of the flesh, the way of the world, and pronounced that as in fact Yahweh worship. And it was all this which Hosea was so deeply sensitive to, as demonstrated by the careful word plays he made, in order to demonstrate that their worship of Yahweh was in fact idol worship.

There will be no birth, none with child, and no conception- Gomer had no conception from Hosea, and became infertile, just like Israel were to God (:14).

No conception, barren wombs, dead children, wandering (Hos. 9:11,15-17) is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Lev. 26:26). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 9:12 *Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them, so that not a man shall be left. Indeed, woe also to them when I depart from them!*- It would seem from :12-15 that Gomer's children were killed during one of the invasions, and she became infertile, with "a miscarrying woman and dry breasts" (:14). In Jewish terms of those days, to marry such a woman was pointless and absurd. But still, Hosea dreamt of the way when she would return to him in her heart and they could re-establish their relationship. She had nothing at all to offer him. Just like us with God. But such is His senseless love... "O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself: but in me is thine help" (Hos. 13:9). Gomer's sexual addiction was a reflection of the way she was crying out for love. The crying tragedy was that the love of Hosea, reflective as it was of God's love, was just surpassing. And yet she didn't perceive it, didn't want it... and so her mad search for love led her to the chronic sexual addiction which destroyed her and left her barren. And finally, God would depart from them, but only because they had first departed from Him (Hos. 7:14 s.w.). This was the final "woe", that the most amazing lover had now gone. We wonder whether this was ever realized in Hosea departing from Gomer. We sense that he never did, just as God has never fully left His natural people.

Hos 9:13 *I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place-* The analogy with Tyre is perhaps because Israel had accepted the idols of Tyre into their worship, not least because Ahab and his descendants had married into the royal family of Tyre; Jezebel was from there. The appropriacy goes further, however. We see from Ez. 27 [see notes there] that Tyre presented itself as another Jerusalem, as the "pleasant place" [s.w. "holy habitation" of Yahweh, Ex. 15:13; Is. 33:20], the city where in fact the true sanctuary of God was to be found. Ephraim would not go to worship at the Jerusalem temple, but instead chose Tyre. And this would lead to Israel's children being slain as Tyre's would be.

But Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer- I suggested on :12 that this was matched by Gomer's illicit children being killed during one of the invasions or raids upon Israel.

Hos 9:14 *Give them--Yahweh, what will you give them? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts-* As noted on :12, Gomer became infertile, the result of her idolatry and promiscuity. The children she had from her illicit affairs were killed by the invaders; so infertility was a curse with a slightly silver lining in her case. Hosea loved her all the same; but she would be a useless partner for him, in Hebrew terms. And the same was true of God's love for Israel. Israel in this section is addressed as

"Ephraim", meaning 'fruitful'. Ephraim was now to have the possibility of bearing fruit taken away, because they didn't wish to bear fruit anyway. Again we encounter the idea of spiritual capacity and opportunity being removed from us unless we use it. Yet all this is backdrop to the final intention of God expressed in Hos. 14, that Israel like Gomer would still miraculously bring forth fruit / children to Him.

Hos 9:15 *All their wickedness is in Gilgal; for there I hated them-* The mention of Gilgal is difficult because we are unaware that there was any more idolatry there than elsewhere. But probably the reference is to the way that Israel's demand for a human king at Gilgal was the epitome of their unfaithfulness to Yahweh; they thereby rejected Him as their king, master and husband; see on :17 and Hos. 10:3. They of course claimed to still have Him as their king, just as Gomer protested she was still Hosea's wife whilst having affairs with others. As Hosea went through flashes of hatred against Gomer, so did God. But His hatred was for a moment, because Hosea's prophecies go on to declare His undying love for His people. See on Hos. 10:9. And yet Gilgal apparently was a centre of idolatry at this time (Hos. 4:15; 12:11; Am. 4:4; 5:5). Yahweh hated how He was worshipped there in the form of Baal worship. Possibly Gomer worked there as a cult prostitute; so there Hosea hated her.

God several times speaks of His "hate" for persons and behaviour. And the Hebrew word means just that, not "to love less". His love is not unconditional; that is a myth of humanism, even if it has become a buzzword within liberal Christianity. God's love did evolve throughout Hosea, and it did from the Old Testament to the New, but it still required acceptance of it. Even if it is so that the conditions are waived or amended [we think of the progressive urging of anyone to come in to the marriage supper, or to go work in the vineyard even for an hour]. But there has to be some "Yes!" to the offer of love. God's love and our response to it is *chesed*, covenant love... love within a covenant, loyalty. This doesn't mean we won't sin nor fail. Nor are we any kind of equal in the Divine-human encounter. But still, there must be a "yes" and a willful abiding within the covenant. Outside of that is the darkness of separation from God, albeit self chosen.

Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house!- This part of the prophecy is directed at Ephraim, the ten tribes who refused to go to the temple. Now, they were barred from it. But being driven out of a husband's house is also a figure for divorce; the same language is used of how Hagar was driven out of her husband Abraham's house. The Hebrew for "drive out" here is specifically used of divorce (e.g. Lev. 21:7,14; "her that is put away" Ez. 44:22). So often God and Hosea had these flashes of desire to divorce their partners, which given the gross adultery involved, they could have quite legitimately done. The protestation of God's eternal love for Israel is the more meaningful and intense once we realize that He had these feelings of hatred towards them at times. Our sins likewise anger God, and His love for us must be seen in that context and against that background.

I will love them no more- It was because of his great love for Gomer that Hosea came to feel the passionate anger with her which he did at times; and in this his spirit was that of God toward Israel. "I will love them no more" has to be balanced against his later profession that "I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4). In the end, because he loved her, as God loved Israel, finally giving up this terrible woman proved impossible: "How shall I give you up?... My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger..." (Hos. 11:8,9).

The offer of the new covenant relationship with Judah is made with the comment that God loves Israel with "an everlasting love" (Jer. 30:3). But this wonderful fact is nuanced by the way God arrived at that conclusion- through times when He felt that He would not love them any more. And covenant relationship with Him is so often predicated upon His people remaining faithful to the covenant (Dt. 7:12,13). Just as Hosea felt to Gomer. Here for all time we have the answer to the assumption that God's love is unconditional. More correctly, He says that it is conditional, and says He withdraws love; but in reality, His love for Israel continued, through all the wrath of judgment. To speak of His love as "unconditional" is to over simplify the profound. The fact is, some objects of God's love are not reached by that love, because they refuse it. And some who were reached by it withdraw themselves from it.

All their princes are rebels- The "princes" were represented by the children of Gomer, whom we can assume rebelled against their quasi father Hosea. The princes of Israel and Judah are mentioned several times as rebellious.

Hos 9:16 *Ephraim is struck-* God smote Israel in His anger (Is. 60:10 s.w.); but the word is used of how God struck His children in order to discipline them (Jer. 2:30 s.w.). God smote them, but intended to bind them up at the restoration (Hos. 6:1 s.w.). His judgments are designed to elicit repentance and are not the outpouring of pure anger alone. We note the present tense: "Is struck", although they had not yet been smitten- see on :6.

Their root has dried up. They will bear no fruit. Even though they bring forth, yet I will kill the beloved ones of their womb- As noted on :12 and :14, Gomer like Israel was to become barren; and the children of adultery were to be killed by the invaders. Here the figure is changed to a crop with a dry root and therefore no fruit. They had never borne fruit to God, as Gomer had not for Hosea; and so the opportunity for spiritual fruit bearing was taken away from them. But the same word for "dried up" is used of the lifeless, dried bones of Ez. 37:11, which could be revived by the Spirit given under the new covenant.

Hos 9:17 *My God will cast them away-* God has been speaking in the first person in the previous verses. But Hosea's feelings and spirit were those of God. He now interjects with his own summary of the situation, and that too is inspired or in-spired by God. He was no mere printing device pumping out a message. God did "cast them away", and yet finally "God has not cast away His people" (Rom. 11:1), just as Lev. 26:44 had promised He would not, even though He send them into exile. I suggested on :15 that Israel's sin in choosing a human king was there in view; this had been the ultimate action which epitomized their rejection of God as their king and husband. The same word for "cast away" is used in this context in 1 Sam. 10:19; they thereby "rejected your God". Because they "rejected" [s.w. "cast away"] knowing God, having relationship with Him in the Hebraic sense of 'knowing', He rejected them (Hos. 4:6).

Because they did not listen to Him- If by this God meant 'They weren't obedient to My specific commandments', then a different word would have been used. God is not a casuist nor a legalist. The Hebrew for "listen" better means to perceive, to literally listen to a person, as one listens to the lover with whom you wish to develop a relationship. This is not to say that obedience to specifics is unimportant to God; but essentially He sought a relationship with Israel, as Hosea did with Gomer. But Gomer

refused to 'know' Hosea, perhaps sexually, but also in terms of relationship; and so it was with Israel toward their God.

And they will be wanderers among the nations- The same word has already been used in Hos. 7:13 for how Israel wandered from God, and went to the nations not only in idolatry but in seeking their help against their invaders, rather than God's help. Always, the judgments upon Israel are only a reflection back to them of how they had been with God. Quite simply, all who truly with all their hearts "love His appearing" shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). If we don't want to be in His Kingdom, then we will not be; if with all our hearts we do, then we shall be. If we wander off from God and prefer the world, then we shall go to the world and be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). We make the answer now. The analogy with Hosea-Gomer is that Gomer wandered from lover to lover and never found stability. And this category, Jude says, will wander in darkness like lost stars. That is what the condemnation experience will be about- living out the essence of how they chose to live in this life.

HOSEA CHAPTER 10

Hos 10:1 *Israel is a luxuriant vine that puts forth his fruit-* This continues the imagery of Hos. 9:10 a few verses before; God in love saw Israel like this in the wilderness, imputing goodness to them, even though they did not have real spiritual fruit. "Luxuriant" rather than "empty" [as AV] seems the right reading, because the next clause talks of this vine's abundant fruit. The prophecy concludes with a picture of Israel just like this in Hos. 14:5-7. This is what they were capable of- repenting, and becoming the reestablished Kingdom of God as a blessing to others. Even in condemning Israel and divorcing them, Yahweh still held to this final vision for them. Just as Hosea fantasized of how the now barren and bereaved Gomer would somehow bring forth fruit to him.

According to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied his altars- Baal was a fertility cult, and so the more God blessed them with good harvests, the more they worshipped Baal. This was the ultimate abuse of God's love. Material blessing so often leads to something far worse than the spoilt child syndrome; it led Israel to Baal, because they abused the Divine blessings. The fruit on the vine however, as explained on Hos. 9:10, was how God perceived them. The more He loved them and imputed beauty to them, the more they abused it. We are in a relationship with God whereby His love for us is far greater than ours for Him; and it is so easy for us to abuse that. We note the plural- "altars". Repeatedly, the prophets condemn Israel for following "other gods" in the plural. Israel worshipped many gods, many baalim, a baal for this and for that; just as Gomer had many lovers, and served as a cult prostitute at various shrines to many gods.

As their land has prospered, they have adorned their sacred stones- "Prospered" and "adorned" are the same word. The AV is better: "according to the *goodness* of his land they have made *goodly* images". Baal was a fertility god. The more blessing Yahweh gave them in terms of good harvests, the more they made "good" idols to Baal. They attributed the good harvests to Baal and not Yahweh. This was all reflected in how Gomer took Hosea's material blessings and offered them to Baal, and also received payment from the men she slept with. She attributed those 'blessings' of

payment to the blessing of Baal. The more God blessed His people by grace, the more they abused it. Israel were indeed prosperous at the time of Jeroboam II, and there is archaeological evidence of her prosperity at the time, and for the marked growth in size of Jerusalem. This was the love of Hosea for Gomer reflecting God's apparently senseless love for Israel.

Hos 10:2 *Their heart is divided, and so now they will be found guilty*- Yet again, the essential guilt of Israel was because of the state of their hearts. Just as Gomer claimed to be married to Hosea whilst having affairs, so Israel's heart was divided between God and idols. It is this state of division which is so painful to God and which is the basis for guilt. If we are in relationship with God, He absolutely must have our entire heart. We think of the Lord's desire that the Laodicean church would be either hot or cold, but not lukewarm. A divided heart makes us far worse than those who are ignorant of Him. Perhaps James alludes here in soberly warning against having a double heart toward God (James 1:8; 4:8). We stand before God's judgment "now". Hosea realized the critical intensity of the moment; right now, they were found guilty in court before God. The judgment "will be" [demolition of altars, etc.]- and in that gap, they could repent. This is the intensity of our position before God. This is the crucial importance of life and living now.

"Will be found guilty" may mean that it was God's hope, as it was Hosea's for Gomer, that they would recognize their guilt. This is the same hope as in :3, "Surely they will now say...". This repeated hopefulness for their repentance is such a major theme in Hosea. It was rooted in love, for love "hopes all things". And it is part of our love for this world and for individuals. Even if that hope, as in Hosea, is never realized. To love someone is to hope for them. "The hope of Israel" is an ambiguous genitive. The hope that Israel has, or, the hope for Israel which God has. Not all Israel will experience that hope, certain as hope, *elpis*, really is. Israel's hope is the hope they have, but like "the world's redemption" it will not save / redeem all the world. The hope of Israel, the hope for and about Israel, is God's hope for them. It was Hosea's hope for Gomer. But very few of "Israel" will experience it.

He will demolish their altars, He will destroy their sacred stones- Presumably the invaders destroyed the gods of those they conquered. The Canaanite idols were not those of Babylon or Assyria.

Hos 10:3 *Surely now they will say, We have no king; for we don't fear Yahweh; and the king we have, what can he do for us?*- Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their 'king' (Hos. 13:10). But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the 'king' of his wife. God's appeal was reflected in Hosea's desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: "What then should a king do [for] us?". She was so selfish that she didn't see anything in it for her... when so much love was being offered to her. All this explains why God felt that Israel's rejection of Him at Gilgal when they asked for a human king was the epitome of their marital unfaithfulness to Him (see on Hos. 9:15). Israel in exile were without God as their king, and without the human king of their choosing. This is the indescribable agony of the rejected; they are left without that which they loved, and also without God.

Hos 10:4 *They make promises, swearing falsely in making covenants*- The preceding verse, as explained there, is in the marital context. Israel had despised their marriage covenant with God (see on Hos. 8:1) as Gomer had with Hosea. They had

made a false oath. But they had likewise made false oaths in their secular lives, breaking the covenant they made with Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:4).

Therefore judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field- This continues the theme of Israel reaping what they had sown (see on Hos. 8:7). By not being serious about their promises, the harvest was poisonous weeds ruining their crop. The result seems out of proportion, in secular terms, to 'just' not being serious about their promises. But this again is a great theme of the prophets- that apparently 'little sins' reap massive and eternal consequences. The mention of the furrows prepares us for :12. They had ploughed and sown, but to evil. Hosea will go on to appeal for them to do so to righteousness. "Poisonous weeds" is the same word used in Deuteronomy, of how Israel's grapes (:1) would become poison because of their idolatry (Dt. 29:18; 32:32,33). The word is used of how the Lord Jesus on the cross was given such poison to drink (Ps. 69:21); there, He carried the condemnation of Israel (Jer. 8:14; 9:15 s.w.). All His sufferings were their judgments. In this sense He bore [the condemnation for] our sins.

Hos 10:5 *The inhabitants of Samaria will be in terror because of the calves of Beth Aven-* Beth Aven is how God and Hosea saw Beth El. The house of God had become the house of idols and sin. "Be in terror" is the same word translated "assemble themselves" [in prayer and worship] in Hos. 7:14. The people loved their idols, and begged their gods that these idols not be removed from them. Bethel [where the golden calf was] is called Beth Aven in Josh. 7:2.

For its people will mourn over it, along with its priests who rejoiced over it; because its glory has departed from it- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory*. The people mourned the loss of their beloved calves and their removal by the Assyrians as a trophy for their gods (:6). This is the measure of idolatry; when the worshippers mourn when their idol is removed. They should have removed the idols, and so God does so- and they weep and pray that they be not removed. Again, God's issue with Israel was not concerning individual acts of obedience or disobedience, but a general state of heart and direction in life.

Hos 10:6 *It also will be carried to Assyria for a present to a great king-* The golden calves were carried off by the Assyrians. As noted on :5, they ought to have removed them themselves, and so God removed them. And they were terribly upset about it. This is the measure of a man; if at the Lord's return our idols of wealth, homes, cars, devices... are removed from us, will we like Lot's wife look back in anger and sadness? Or count all such things as nothing that we might press on and be with the Lord? "A great king" is AV "Jareb", the avenger / defender. The idea is 'A present to the king (whom they looked to as) their defender / avenger'. They should have treated Yahweh as their king, defender and avenger. But they turned to Assyria for help, and now were destroyed by Assyria. In terms of the Hosea-Gomer relationship, the lovers turned against them.

Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of his own counsel- Hitzig translates: "He (the Assyrian king) shall take away or carry off the shame of Ephraim; that is, the calf-idol". The calves should have been their shame, but instead they mourned for them (:5). They went where their calves went- to captivity in Assyria. We become like that which we worship. The calves were built by Jeroboam after "taking counsel" (1 Kings 12:28); hence "his own counsel" refers to the calves. Yet Israel collectively are accused of Jeroboam's sin; he "made them sin", but they did so willingly, and so we see clarified the principle that even if we are led into sin by others, we still remain responsible for our sin. And the person, such as Jeroboam, who

led us into the sin is also as it were charged for it. See on :8. "His own counsel" would be a reference to I Kings 12:28: "The king took counsel and made two golden calves".

Hos 10:7 *Samaria and her king will float away, like a twig on the water*- The ten tribes and their king were taken captive; the Assyrian invasions are likened to an overflowing river which carried them away. Again we have the figure of lightness, seen in the lighthearted and not serious attitude of Gomer to Hosea's great love.

Hos 10:8 *The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle will come up on their altars*- Thorns and thistles are the punishment for sin, as clearly stated in Eden. Their altars would not be used by others, but would be left as ruins, covered by the judgment for sin. "Aven" or Beth Aven is how God and Hosea saw Beth El, no longer the house of God but the house of idols. Although Jeroboam built the shrine there and made Israel sin thereby, it was still "the sin of Israel", their sin. See on :6. Bethel [where the golden calf was] is called Beth Aven in Josh. 7:2.

They will tell the mountains, Cover us! and the hills, Fall on us!- Instead of calling out to Yahweh in repentance as they were carried into captivity, Israel instead just wished to die; the hills or high places were associated with their sins, and they would choose death rather than repentance. They would prefer to die at the hands of their high places rather than repent. The Lord quoted these words to the women watching Him carry His cross, applying them to the Jews in AD70, whom He sensed would likewise be impenitent; His quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. Israel were a useless tree (:1), a twig cut off (:7). If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot or twig, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. The Lord's following words as He carried the cross were: "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?", and they are packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

Hos 10:9 *Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah, there they remained. The battle against the children of iniquity doesn't overtake them in Gibeah*- The idea of the Hebrew could be 'More even than in the days of Gibeah'. "The battle" in view is based upon that against the Benjamites by the other tribes of Israel because of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine in Gibeah (Jud. 18). That "battle" in judgment of their iniquity didn't stop there, it didn't "overtake them" or end there; because they continued the essence of that sin, sinning like that from that day onward, Benjamin was yet to suffer. "There they remained" would mean that they adhered to that trait since then. Yet it is "Israel", the ten tribes, who addressed; and yet Benjamin, one of the two tribes of Judah, is also to be judged. This is another example of the two kingdoms being judged with the same judgment. The Divine hope that Judah would be more repentant didn't come true. The Hebrew however is difficult here, and the GNB may be correct in suggesting a particular judgment against Judah at Gibeah, which was the home of Saul, the king / partner they chose after rejecting Yahweh as

their king / partner / husband: "The LORD says, "The people of Israel have not stopped sinning against me since the time of their sin at Gibeah. So at Gibeah war will catch up with them". See on Hos. 9:15.

Hos 10:10 *When it is my desire, I will chastise them; and the nations will be gathered against them, when they are bound to their two transgressions-* Binding them to their sins presumably means judging them for their sins. The two sins could refer to the two calves set up by Jeroboam; or to the equal sins of Israel and Judah; see on :9. But again we note that their judgment at the hands of the nations was intended as a chastisement, with the hope of reformation [s.w. "correct", "reform"]. Not of the generation who perished, but the hope was that others would be chastised by what happened at the invasion, and be reformed. Yet this intention and possibility didn't really come about. The gathering of plural nations could be understood by the Assyrians and Babylonians using mercenaries from the surrounding nations; but as the Lord understood the judgment to apply to AD70 and the last days (see on :8), so these judgments look ahead to the final tribulation of Israel when "all nations shall be gathered" against them.

"Their two transgressions" can be "their two rings". The two rings may refer to goads placed near the eyes of the ox. Verse 11 Heb. speaks of Ephraim as a goaded heifer.

Hos 10:11 *Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh-* The idea may be that they preferred the easier work of threshing than of ploughing. Ephraim had been trained or taught, but they refused to listen (Jer. 32:33 s.w.). But threshing is a figure of judgment, and the great prophetic theme is that Israel received the judgments which they themselves had lived out through their profligate living.

So I will put a yoke on her beautiful neck- "Her beautiful neck" reflects how much God loved Israel; even in putting them under the yoke, He saw her beauty and loved her. It seems that Hosea's attraction to Gomer, even when she became barren, likewise continued despite all her unfaithfulness.

I will set a rider on Ephraim, Judah will plough, Jacob will break his clods- We note the parallel between the ten tribes and the two tribes. They had sinned together, and would both be judged, but it was the Divine hope that they would come together out of exile and reestablish God's kingdom in the land. The rider upon them could be a Messianic figure; or it could be that their dominators in exile would be the means of their ploughing and sowing to righteousness rather than sin, as noted on :4. But the returned exiles didn't really live up to this; the pain of God through Hosea was that so much potential was wasted by Israel's short term outlook and desire for the immediate and the sinful.

Hos 10:12 *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Yahweh, until He comes and rains righteousness on you-* As noted on :4, they had ploughed and sown, but to evil. Now they were to do so to righteousness. This new approach to living, to sowing, was to be achieved whilst in captivity (see on :11). They were to realize their spiritual potential, their fallow ground, and seek Yahweh so that the Messianic rain of righteousness could come down upon them. The Messianic kingdom could have come then, but they would not, and so it has been delayed until God's people truly seek Him. The faithful few such as Ezra encouraged the exiles to "seek Yahweh" (Ezra 7:10; Is. 55:6 s.w.); but generally they weren't interested. "Rains" is also the word for "to teach", and has

been used in :11 of how previously, Israel had been 'taught' but had refused to listen. If they sought Yahweh, if they opened up their fallow ground, then He would teach them. We find God not by academic Bible study alone; it is the heart's desire to seek God which results in Him teaching us. It's not that God hides behind the pages of the Bible until we find Him. He comes to us and teaches us; but in response to our broken hearted seeking of Him.

Hos 10:13 *You have ploughed wickedness and you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies-* See on :4. "Lies" here effectively stands for idols. The "wickedness" they sowed was "the wind", a superficial life with a lighthearted approach to the heavy things of God's glory; and they reaped the whirlwind (see on Hos. 8:7). "The wind", the lighthearted attitude to God which characterizes so many in our age, is here "wickedness" and "iniquity". Again we see how such attitudes which are seen as totally excusable and understandable in secular terms are seen by God as great wickedness.

For you trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men- Israel are repeatedly condemned in Hosea for hiring foreign warriors to defend them rather than turning to Yahweh for help. They trusted in those men, who were effectively "your way". The way of Yahweh is total trust in Him. To trust in human strength is to depart from His way; and this sets us a huge challenge, in an age where as never before there are all manner of schemes to apparently save us from the consequences of sin.

Hos 10:14 *Therefore a battle roar will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth Arbel in the day of battle. The mother was dashed in pieces with her children-* Shalman could be a contraction for Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king who destroyed the ten tribe kingdom. But Hosea here speaks in the past tense, and Shalmaneser destroyed Samaria forty years after Hosea. So there may here be reference to a historical incident which we don't know about, by a king called Shalman. Or the reference could be to the first invasion by Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3), when one border fortress at Beth Arbel was destroyed. Israel trusted in their fortresses (see on Hos. 11:6), and they were intended to learn from the destruction of just one of them. God works in such a gentle way with us; we may see one aspect of our human defences destroyed, one bank fails, one insurance policy fails to cover us. And this should lead us to not depend upon the others we have and throw ourselves completely on Yahweh. The massacre at the otherwise unknown little fortress of Beth Arbel was intended to be a warning of judgment to come; and they could have avoided it if they had been perceptive. We too see dry runs of judgment to come, in our own lives and in the experiences of others we are aware of. And we are to take the lesson.

Hos 10:15 *So Bethel will do to you because of your great wickedness-* Bethel and its shrine would bring about their judgment at the hands of the Assyrians (:14); their idols were the ones who were to destroy them, just as Israel had turned to Assyria and its idols for help, and then Assyria turned upon them and destroyed them.

At daybreak the king of Israel will be destroyed- This could have been literally uttered the night before the assassination or death of one of the kings contemporary with Hosea, perhaps Hoshea. "In a morning" (Heb.) might mean 'suddenly, unexpectedly'. Or it could have been a prophecy whose fulfilment was delayed or even cancelled by repentance. Or again, the night of judgment is perhaps portrayed as daybreak because there is always the hope of reformation and the final dawn of the

Messianic age hinted at in all the Divine threats of judgment. Just as Hosea intended to make Gomer suffer in order than she would quit her lovers and return to him.

HOSEA CHAPTER 11

Hos 11:1 *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt-* As noted on Hos. 8:1, God had entered into marriage covenant with Israel at Sinai. He had called them out of Egypt for that to be possible; but they had in their hearts returned to Egypt and thereby despised their marriage covenant. So often in Hosea, God seeks to remind Israel of their national beginnings, and the grace He showed. His calling of them was the sign of pure grace, Paul reasons in Romans. That call was not because they were righteous, just as Hosea didn't call Gomer to marriage because she was righteous. The call is in the Gospel; we who have heard it only heard it by grace. So we should never doubt His grace and intention toward us. We note that God's love for Israel was shown by His call of them. Paul argues the same in Romans, that Divine love is instanced through our being predestinated, chosen and therefore called. This calling was all of grace, both for Israel and for the new Israel.

So often in the prophets, Hosea especially, God idealizes His past with Israel, and then bitterly laments their present unfaithfulness. The truth was that they were unfaithful from the start. But again we see in this something very human, something we can imagine in Hosea's feelings towards Gomer. He idealized their past relationship, even though she was a whore when they married; and laments her present unfaithfulness. He now actualizes in his mind the knowledge he had all along; that she was a whore. And God is revealing Himself as going through the same process. This does not make Him capricious or somehow not all knowing. It simply reflects how we are made in His image and therefore this 'human' capacity to be like this- is in fact a reflection of how He also is.

God had said that Israel would return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3), but then says here that they would not (:5). He comes to that feeling on remembering how He had brought them out of Egypt. But these words are quoted about the Lord Jesus as a child being brought out from Egypt. Perhaps the connection of thought is in the fact that His same grace toward His people was supremely in His Son. Or it could be that the failed 'son' of God, Israel, becomes a type of the Lord Jesus in an inverse sense, just as the way the High Priest *stood* serving is seen as the intended inverse of the way the Lord Jesus is *seated* whilst serving in the heavenly sanctuary.

These words are quoted about the Father calling Joseph and Mary to bring His Son out of Egypt (Mt. 2:14,15). But that is hardly the context here. It is not necessarily so in Bible study of quotations that "context is king". The New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Hosea's plans for Gomer ultimately failed, and so did God's desires to save the Israel of Hosea's days and subsequent generations. But this doesn't mean that His word was falsified, nor that the objectives He has set in human history didn't ultimately work out. "Israel" here becomes the Lord Jesus; just as the "servant" prophecies of Isaiah were initially about Israel as a nation. They didn't live up to them at the restoration,

and so they were reinterpreted and reapplied to the Lord Jesus. He and then those in Him became the Israel of God, who did respond.

The passage condemns Israel's behaviour from a child. It has been observed that it has many similarities with documents which are formal disownings of a child, giving all the reasons. Rather like some of the criticisms of Israel are expressed in terms of contemporary divorce statements. This is God disowning His own child, just as Hosea disowned 'His' children by Gomer, calling them Lo-Ammi, not mine. And yet Yahweh is unable to finally do this for His beloved child Israel. Such disownings of a child even to having them executed were known by the Israelites from Dt. 21:18-21. We have a similar passage in Is. 1:2-20, where hope is still held out that the child may repent. Here, God is as it were the plaintiff before a court. He presents the evidence, but then in :8 and onwards He as it were withdraws the case, overcome by love for His child. Death was the punishment for a rebellious child (Dt. 21:18-21), but here God decides not to go ahead with this. His reactions and feelings are those of every parent of wayward children- they remember the infancy and early childhood of the child, and this pulls at their desire to discipline and judge.

Hos 11:2 *The more I called to them, so they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to engraved images-* The more God revealed His word of call and invitation to Israel, the more they rebelled against Him. This is also how God's word function now; it elicits either our response or our rejection. Hosea knew all this from his personal experience of being the vehicle of God's call and word to Israel. The more he tried, both with Israel and Gomer, the more they turned away (Jer. 2:27). "I called" is AV "They called", referring to the ministry of the prophets. God's intention was that a reborn Israel, born again by the Spirit which would be given as part of the new covenant, would again as it were come out of Egypt to Him, and this had been Hosea's hope of Gomer too (Hos. 2:15). "They went away" is literally, 'they walked away from My face'. The Divine call to Israel was a revelation of His very face, an invitation to intimate relationship. But they turned away from it, telling Moses that they didn't want to hear the voice of Yahweh nor come near to Him; they wanted mere religion instead, Moses going near and telling them what he heard. And Gomer likewise rejected Hosea's desperate desire for an intimate, exclusive relationship with him.

Hos 11:3 *Yet I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that it was I who healed them-* God likens Himself to Israel's father, teaching His little child to walk for the first time; or more precisely, teaching the child to walk despite a handicap that required healing and the strengthening of its arms. We noted the same on Hos. 7:15. As the child 'makes it' into the Father's arms for the first time, there must be a tremendous *excitement* for the Father. A few uncertain, jittering steps- and He is thrilled and telling the whole world about it with joy. No matter how clever or powerful that man is in the world. And so this is how God was with His people, it's how it is with us too as we take our first unsure steps after baptism. He has the capacity for thrill and excitement, just as we do, who are made in His image.

The statement that God "healed them" is in the context of His teaching Israel to walk as an infant. He graciously saw their sins and resultant bruises as being the result of their attempts to walk, and falling over. Teaching an infant to walk involves a lot of comforting and 'healing' of them because they inevitably fall over. In reality, their sins were rank rebellion, but Yahweh kindly, lovingly viewed them as mere mistakes made whilst learning to walk with Him.

That Israel "did not know / recognize" God's love was so painful, for Yahweh and also for Hosea in his unrequited, unappreciated love for Gomer (Hos. 2:8; 5:4; 11:3). God wanted to destroy Israel for this lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6,14). He had called them out of Egypt, but they in spirit had returned there. Perhaps He calls them "Ephraim" because Ephraim had been born in Egypt [Joseph's son by Asenath]. They had forgotten that calling out because of the massive material blessings which Yahweh had spoilt them with, thus fulfilling the scenario envisaged in Dt. 6: 12, "Then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery". Forgetting Him was not knowing Him.

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3). Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness", Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

Remembering how He had felt towards His child Israel in earlier days, God cries out in :8 with a stab of pain: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?". The memory of Israel's childhood was just too much. It made God

change His mind with regard to totally rejecting His wayward son. In preaching to Israel, we are beseeching the prodigal child to return to the desperately grieving Father... for His sake we do this. It is too much for me to think of God so hurt... we surely *have* to do something about it, to appeal to His people.

The strengthening of their arms was an act of 'healing', and the same word is used of how God healed Israel as they left Egypt (Ex. 15:26), so that there was not one feeble amongst all their tribes (Ps. 105:37). They were not an attractive child, in this sense. But God loved them as His very own, just as Hosea did Gomer.

Hos 11:4 *I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift off the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him-* This all continues the baby / toddler analogy; swaddled tightly in swaddling clothes, which were wrapped by "a man", when this was and is stereotypically a mother's work. Likewise it is the mother who bends over to breastfeed. But it was God, who lifted the yoke of Egypt from them, who is presented as performing these classically feminine, motherly roles. It was all a most unusual image for the Israel of those days. But this was God's most unusual care for Israel. Acts 13:18 emphasizes it: "For about the time of forty years, as a nursing father He carried them in the wilderness". Or we can read this as: "I was drawing them with human cords, with bands of love, I was with them like those who lift an infant to their breasts; I bent down to feed him". In this case, God is expressing His ability to relate to Israel as their mother as well as their Father. He is presented as Father but can be compared also to mother. Dt. 32:18 speaks of God as the woman who gave birth to Israel: "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth".

God as a kind farmer released the yoke so that it didn't weigh so heavily. But they abused that.

Hos 11:5 *They won't return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent-* Because of the memory of how He had saved them from Egypt, God now changes His planned judgment- instead of returning to Egypt, they would go to Assyria. God can change His plans, and He has emotions. He had earlier stated that they would return to Egypt and be derided there (Hos. 7:16). God says this clearly in Hos. 8:13; 9:3,6. But just as clearly He now says that they will not return to Egypt but rather experience captivity in Assyria. Here we see how God's changes of heart were so kindled, as were Hosea's regarding Gomer (Hos. 11:8). But then in :11 He speaks as if they will go into Egypt. In all this we see an example of His terrible churnings of heart spoken of in :8. He is not capricious, rather does He allow Himself to genuinely struggle within Himself over His people, wishing to save and so not wanting to condemn.

For a man to be someone's king was a Hebraism for being a husband to a wife. As Gomer committed adultery against Hosea, so Israel had done with the Assyrians. And so Assyria would be their king, the husband they had chosen. Exile there and becoming part of the Assyrian kingdom was therefore what they had chosen.

Hos 11:6 *The sword will fall on their cities, and will destroy the bars of their gates, and will put an end to their plans-* Instead of trusting in Yahweh for help, Israel had trusted in their fortresses (see on Hos. 10:14) and barred gates; and they had made clever plans to get help from other nations. But all such scheming would fail. "The bars of their gates" can also be translated "their branches", continuing the allusions to Israel as a tree without fruit. Their very branches would be cut off, used as a figure of

Israel's rejection in Rom. 11:17. They would now be unable to bear spiritual fruit, the possibility to be spiritua

Falling by the sword is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:25). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

I would be taken away from them. Similarly Gomer was made barren, because she would not bring forth fruit unto Hosea.

Hos 11:7 *My people are determined to turn from Me. Though they call to the Most High, they certainly won't exalt Him-* See on Hos. 6:6 *The knowledge of God*. They would not exalt Him in the way which true repentance requires. "Judah has not turned unto me with her *whole* heart, but feignedly" (Jer. 3:10). They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it. Israel called both to Yahweh, but also to Egypt for help (Hos. 7:11 s.w.). They didn't therefore accept Him as "the Most High". He was just another possibility to try. They prayed, they repented- but just on a surface level. This ability of human nature to display pseudo spirituality must provoke our endless self-examination. In Israel's case, they did all these things whilst "determined to turn from Me". Yahweh as "Most High" was therefore to be lifted up high. But they did not put meaning into words. They said He was "most high" but wouldn't lift Him high, just as we can use terms and phrases in prayer and worship- without at all living according to them.

But we could translate "And My people waver whether to return to Me". As if, when the prophets teach them to return to Me, they are in doubt whether to return or not to return; the allusion is to Gomer.

Hos 11:8 *How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim?*- God recognized that Israel and Judah and Jerusalem were as Sodom, as the prophets make clear (Judah particularly is likened to Sodom- Is. 1:10; 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ez. 16:46). But all the same, remembering their childhood (:1), He could not bring Himself to judge them as Sodom and her surrounding towns of Admah and Zeboiim; even though Jerusalem had sinned worse than Sodom (Ez. 16:48). Jeremiah's complaint that God had judged Jerusalem more harshly than Sodom (Lam. 4:6) therefore totally failed to take into account His internal struggles. And those who too quickly accuse God of being too harsh or unfair likewise need to consider these passages in Hosea, which reveal just how God struggles over judging sin. Admah and Zeboim are mentioned because Isaiah had observed that God's people were as Sodom. But God would not punish Israel for being as Sodom, even though He punished Sodom for being Sodom. The argument is full of intentional conflicts and paradoxes because it reflects God's own internal conflict.

Clearly the contrast is with God's own words in Hos. 4:17 "Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone!". But God Himself cannot leave Ephraim alone. We see the intense disquiet and trouble within the soul of Yahweh Himself; between 'letting them go' and the desire to never let go of the beloved. We have here in Hosea 11 a unique window onto "God against God", His wrath against His love, His judgment against

His pity, His requirement for repentance against His pure grace. There is no space in the cosmos for any 'God against Satan'. The essential struggle is revealed as God's internal struggle. All because of His love. We see "Ephraim" spoken of in the same way in Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim still my dear son, a child in whom I delight? As often as I turn my back on him, I still remember him".

My heart is turned within Me, My compassion is aroused- The Hebrew for "turned" is a form of the verb "overturned" used about the overturning of Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities just referenced. Instead of overturning Israel as He had done to those cities, His heart is overturned. We must understand that the heart is understood in Hebrew not simply as the center of emotion, but the center of decision making. "I said in my heart..." clearly means "I decided...". And that is the context. God's decision to punish and destroy Israel (as Hosea's regarding Gomer) is now overturned by other emotions and considerations, so that it is His very decision making which is "overturned" or traumatized. The tension within God is apparent. This verse is one of the deepest insights into God's internal struggle. God wants nothing more to do with His adulterous people; and then He pleads with them to come back to Him, breaking His own law, that a put away woman can't return to her first husband. As Joseph's heart was 'warm' for his younger brother Benjamin, so the same word is used about how the heart of God is 'warm' in yearning for His ungrateful people (Gen. 43:30 cp. Hos. 11:8). This is the Divine emotion revealed as never elsewhere. And Jeremiah has something similar: "How can I pardon you... shall I avenge myself on a nation such as this? Shall I not punish them for these things?" (Jer. 5:7-9,28,29). God reveals Himself as oscillating between punishing and redeeming, judging sin and overlooking it. God is open to changing His stated plans (e.g. to destroy Nineveh within forty days, to destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation). He isn't like the Allah of Islam, who conducts a monologue with his followers; the one true God of Israel earnestly seeks dialogue with His people, and as such He enters into all the contradictory feelings and internal debates which dialogue involves. 'God loves the sinner and hates the sin' has always seemed to me problematic, logically and practically. Love is in the end a personal thing; in the end love and hate are appropriate to persons, not abstractions. And the person can't so easily be separated from their actions. Ultimately, it is persons who will be saved or condemned. The prophets reveal both the wrath and love of God towards His people, in the same way as a parent or partner can feel both wrath and love towards their beloved.

Another translation is "My heart recoils within Me", as if deep within God's heart He sees His anger and necessary judgment, but turns away from it. So often do we read of God 'turning from His anger', and this refers to the same thing- turning away deep within His own heart from His wrath. This is arguably the Bible's most intimate window onto the heart of God Himself.

God's threats to punish His people and His desire to forgive them don't somehow cancel each other out as in an equation. They exist within the mind of God in a terrible tension. His many 'repentings' or changes of mind are "kindled together" (AV) as He struggles within Himself to give up His people as He has threatened. And this struggle was reflected within the emotions and through the speeches / writings / poetry of Hosea concerning Gomer. Therefore Hosea's speeches have an air of turbulence and struggle about them, which reflected the spirit / mind of the God who inspired him. The very way he was told to marry, in marked contrast to Jeremiah who was told not to marry (Jer. 16), perhaps indicates the duality of God's feelings toward Israel- a desire to marry them and yet not to do so. The extent of God's wrath with

Israel, and His harsh, angry language against her, was an outcome of His love for her. "For the wrath of God is the love of God", wrote Emil Brunner long ago. It's like when we see a child run out in front of a car and narrowly escape death; the mother is angry and shouts at the child. Whilst we the onlookers breathe a prayer of thanks to God in much calmer terms. And this may help explain to us what appears the harder side of God at times. See on 9:15 *Love them no more*.

Insofar as we realize that God is not passive, but has feelings toward us far more deep and passionate than we can ever know, so far we will realize that life with Him is a daily, passionate experience. It cannot be 'the same old scene'. Consider the passion of God also in Is. 42: "For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant". The prophets are full of such passionate intensity. The prophets are not just predictions of the future. They reveal the passion of God's feelings for His people. At the very time when He condemns them for their adultery against Him, their ingratitude, their worthlessness, He cries out His belief in the blessedness He will one day grace them with.

Almighty God struggled awfully with all this. The way He did it can be read as an omnipotent God bringing about tragedy. Yes, they were taken to captivity, but not without the acutest grief and pain of God Himself. The reality is, God can be aggrieved, hurt, feel rejected. Even though He is Almighty and could avoid all the situations that cause Him these feelings from arising in the first place. Or take Jer. 31:20: "Is Ephraim my dear son?...for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him", or "Is Ephraim still my dear son, A child in whom I delight? As often as I turn my back on him, I still remember him". And the later grief and emotional breakdown of Jeremiah in Lamentations, sitting by the street with none to comfort him, tears dropping in the dust, clutching his hair with his hands... was an intended statement to Judah of God's feelings for them.

This internal struggle of God is found also in Ezekiel. He says that He decided to destroy Israel, but "worked", within Himself, for His Name's sake, not to do so (Ez. 20:8,9,13,14,21,22).

Hos 11:9 *I will not execute the fierceness of My anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of you-* See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory*. As discussed on :8, God struggles with His feelings; He has said He would destroy Ephraim and now He relents. He can do this, because He is God, the one true God, and not the stone faced gods of the nations, for whom any change of their apparent position was seen as a sign that they weren't really gods. And yet finally God did not turn away His anger from His people, and destroyed them at that time (2 Kings 23:26; Jer. 4:8); but He ultimately will turn away His anger, due to the work of the Lord Jesus. See on Hos. 14:4. His mercy and grace is far greater than human parental love. In this sense He is God "and not man". God is kinder than man. This for all time removes the problem of people assuming God has the very limited love and compassion which they found in their parental figures. As Jeremias put it: "For Hosea, the true distance between God and human beings is not marked by inaccessible eminence but by his victory over his justified anger, by his decision to save those who are guilty and condemned to death. In face of this divine self-control all analogies of human thinking and acting fail". "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger" implies His anger was within Him, but He exercise painful self restraint in order not to execute it.

We note that "man" is *ish* and not *adam*. God is saying that He is acting to His woman in a way that no mere mortal male ever would. Amazing as Hosea's love for Gomer was, Yahweh's love was even greater, to the point of the all powerful God whose word is truth actually not operationalizing that full word. Because of His love. The Biblical God is so far from the concrete, unemotional gods of other religions, whose will must simply be submitted to. The triple "I will not..." is perhaps an inversion of "I will be who I will be", just as earlier God has said in Hos. 1:9 that "I will not be" [your God]. But now "I will not [be]" as I said I would be. We see here a struggle within God, within the very core principles and characteristics that are part of His Name, His most essential personality.

God says this fully aware that He is not a man who repents / changes, but does what He says (Num. 23:19). He alludes to this when He says that He changes because He is God and not man. Because of this, He can set beyond His own nature and principles. Just as love leads us all to transcend our own intrinsic bounds. We would do for our child what we would do for nobody else, and find strength beyond our normal natural limits.

Hosea dreamt or fantasized about the day when, he hoped, Gomer [cp. Israel] would return to him. And we find God through the prophets doing this often, as an expression of His love for them. He dreamt of how Israel as His vineyard would again be fruitful: "In that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!... I [will] guard it day and night; I have no wrath" (Is. 27:2,3). He had wrath, and yet at the thought of Israel's blessed future with Him, He could say "I have no wrath". And so here, the God who spoke of slaying Israel with thirst in Hosea 2 could then comment: "I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man... and I will *not* come to destroy" (Hos. 11:9 AV).

God utters His word of judgment, but there is a gap between that point and the execution of it. It is in that gap that we can repent, and He can change His intended judgment. However it seems that during that gap, God also carries on thinking; and in this case, His memory of Israel as a child in the desert was so overpowering and choking that He Himself changed the execution of His threat, despite their lack of repentance.

He was still in the midst of them. And yet the visions of Ezekiel visually demonstrate His presence in the cherubim removing from Jerusalem. So even this relenting was still only temporary. The only other reference in Hosea to "in the midst" is in Hos. 5:4: "The spirit of prostitution is in the midst of you". There, in the midst of their very heart, a heart filled with prostitution and lust- there was God, in all His holiness in the midst of their unholy hearts. And despite being there, He within His heart would not bring Himself to destroy them as He had said He would, and as His own Name and inner heart required Him to do. It is a strange figure- the depth of God's holy heart is revealed, and also the depth of their unholy heart. Through all this we at least learn that love is not painless and involves suffering.

And I will not come in wrath- Perhaps Paul had this in view when he asks the Corinthians rhetorically whether he should come to them in judgment with the rod of wrath, or in the spirit of meekness (1 Cor. 4:21). Or as AV "I will not enter into the city". This could refer to how Sennacherib appeared all set to enter Jerusalem, but this was averted; not simply by the prayers of the faithful remnant, but by God's own change of plan. But finally God did, at the head of the Babylonian and Roman armies. So again we see God's desire to relent, even His decision to relent, overturned by His need to judge rightly.

Hos 11:10 *They will walk after Yahweh, who will roar like a lion; for He will roar, and the children will come trembling from the west-* The "trembling" in view here and in :11 is trembling in repentance; "When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel" (Hos. 13:1). "Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days" (Hos. 3:5). The idea seems to be that when God roared upon the lands of their exile, which were imagined to be Egypt and Assyria, then Israel would repent, both Judah and Ephraim, and would return to Zion in repentance, 'walking after Yahweh'. Just as Hosea planned to make Gomer suffer so that she would then return to him completely, so it was God's intention that the exiles in Babylon and Assyria would lead to a humbled people returning to Him spiritually and literally, to Jerusalem. He would judge their captors like a lion, and the Messianic Kingdom would have been established in the reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. But this scenario didn't happen, just as Gomer never really returned to Hosea.

"The west" here is the Hebrew word *yam*, which simply means "the sea". The reference could be to a second exodus from the Red Sea, which other prophets also envisage.

Hos 11:11 *They will come trembling like a bird out of Egypt, and like a dove out of the land of Assyria; and I will settle them in their houses, says Yahweh-* This was God's fantasy for Israel, as it were. He assumed that they will indeed go into captivity in Egypt, but He would bring them out of it. This never happened; see on :5. God twisted and turned within Himself (:8) as to whether to send them to Egypt in exile, speaking as if He would, imagining Him again bringing them out of there (:1) and remarrying them at Sinai (see on Hos. 8:1). They had gone to Egypt and Assyria for help as a dove without a heart (Hos. 7:11); but He would bring that dove out again.

For those who really 'got it', the marvel of God's grace would lead them to come trembling to Him (Hos. 3:5). He has this hope in view also in Hos. 11:11 "They shall come trembling out of Egypt". Jer. 33:9 hopes that at the restoration, they "shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to [Zion]". The awesome grace would make men tremble as they accepted it, and so it should be with us. Likewise Is. 60:5 "Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill [s.w. "tremble"] and be enlarged". Then we will have the opening of mind to perceive how great is His grace, something which we sense but only see from far in this life. But we will only appreciate that grace to the extent of trembling, if we first accept our deep guilt and whoredom against the God of all grace and love.

Hos 11:12 *Ephraim surrounds Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit-* Despite the amazing love of God for Israel, resulting in such torments in the heart of Almighty God (:8,9), Israel like Gomer just refused to perceive the amazing love and grace being shown to them. As Gomer lied and deceived, so Israel did to God. They surrounded God with these lies, perhaps alluding to a woman like Gomer hugging her husband, when she was in fact having an affair with others. But even in this there is hope and potential for repentance, for Hos. 12 will go on to demonstrate that Jacob / Israel was a deceiver who repented.

Judah still remains with God, and is faithful to the Holy One- But just two verses later: "Yahweh has also a controversy with Judah" (Hos. 12:2). Hosea clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that

they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). These positive words about Judah are therefore irrational, because Judah has so often been bracketed together with Israel in Hosea's prophecies. But this desperate hope that the unfaithful beloved is in fact faithful, just as Hosea hoped for Gomer, speaks of the desperate love of God for His adulterous people. And God has shown this kind of desperate hope at other times, hoping against hope and His own foreknowledge that there would be different outcomes. For desperate hope is all a function of true love. Thus knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would be saved (1 Pet. 3:20). We are not so perfect, but we are left to imagine God's joy that we have responded...

But the text can be translated: "and Judah vacillates still with God".

HOSEA CHAPTER 12

Hos 12:1 *Ephraim feeds on wind, and chases the east wind*- As noted on Hos. 8:7, Israel like Gomer gave their hearts to that which was light and vapid rather than to the heavy things of God. And for that, they reaped the whirlwind. The wind from the east may refer to Assyria (as in Hos. 13:15), whose help they sought. But they were chasing or seeking help from a destructive wind that would itself turn and destroy them. "Chases" translates the same word used in Hos. 2:7 of how Israel / Gomer "*follow after her lovers*" but find no support from them.

He daily lies more and more and multiplies his desolation- See on Hos. 2:12 *Vines... fig trees*. There is an upward and downward spiral in spirituality. Just as Gomer was sexually addicted, so Israel were in the grip of deceit, and they were unfaithful and dishonest in every department of life. Jacob the reformed deceiver is therefore quoted later in this chapter as their role model. Their lies involved deceiving Assyria.

They make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into Egypt- See on Hos. 9:11 *Glory*. The reference is to 2 Kings 17:4, where Israel made a covenant with Assyria and yet sought help against Assyria from Egypt. "Covenant" is the language of marriage. They were in covenant relationship with God (Hos. 8:1), and yet sought covenants with others, just as Gomer did. And they were not even faithful to those other covenant relationships they had made.

Hos 12:2 *Yahweh also has a controversy with Judah*- Hosea was mainly speaking about the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel. Elsewhere in Hosea, God praises Judah's faithfulness, imputing righteousness to them, despite the fact wicked king Ahaz was then in power (Hos. 11:12). This is typical of how God changes His feelings just as Hosea oscillated between tender love and anger with Gomer. He says He will love Israel no more (Hos. 9:15), and then that He will love them freely (Hos. 14:4); that the city will not be entered into (Hos. 11:9 AV), yet also the city would be taken, according to multiple prophecies. They would return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3); but He would not let them return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5). This is God at His most vulnerable. The "controversy" is based upon the 'charge' Hosea had against Gomer (Hos. 2:2 s.w.) for her adultery; it is legal language.

Hosea clearly knew that both Israel and Judah would fall together in condemnation for the same sins (Hos. 5:5; 6:4,10,11; 12:1,2); and yet Hosea appeals to Judah to *not* sin as Israel had so that they would avoid that same condemnation (Hos. 4:15; 11:12). And in similar vein, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would be saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

And will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him- Because Israel believed a lie, they lied and were generally dishonest (see on :1). The repentant deceiver Jacob is therefore held up as their pattern. Here and in Hos. 11:12, God charges Israel with continuing the family characteristic of Jacob by being deceitful and untruthful. Abraham and Jacob especially were characterized by great dishonesty. The excursus about Jacob is perfectly in context with Hosea's struggles with Gomer, and therefore God's anguish with Jacob / Israel. Hosea saw the necessity of disciplining Gomer; she was as fickle with Hosea as Jacob had been with God. But Jacob was brought through all that to repentance and a desperate clinging on to God's covenant grace; and this was always Hosea's hope for Gomer, that she

would follow the spiritual path of Jacob, fickle as he was for much of his life. Just as God became vulnerable to Jacob because He loved Jacob so much, and allowed Jacob to win because He let him... so Hosea's love for Gomer left him vulnerable to her and eager for every and any sign of repentance.

But Hos. 4:14 uses the same word in declaring that "I will not punish...". And so often the point is made that God did not punish Israel according to their sins (Ps. 103:10). Here we see another example of how God in His passion, like Hosea in his, does not actually do the things He states He will do. Adam not dying in the day of his sin would be the first of many examples. It is this openness of God to change which is now exemplified in this chapter by the remarkable incident of Jacob prevailing against God and likewise not being punished 'according to his ways'.

Hos. 12:3 *In the womb he took his brother by the heel*- Gen. 25:26 says that Jacob did this *after* the birth, and not within the womb. A baby in the womb enveloped in water cannot do this; this was counted to Jacob by God's gracious imagination, just as Hosea fantasized about and imagined the repentance and faithfulness of the faithless Gomer. Or perhaps the idea is that genetically, Jacob was set up as a deceiver and grasper. Just as Gomer was wired as a light hearted, empty headed person who went for what looked attractive to her eyes and senses. Just as Israel were. And exactly as we naturally are. But the idea is that although that's how Jacob was, by nature and by nurture, he changed. This chapter concludes with a lament that Israel remained as Jacob and even as Canaan, "a merchant".

Likewise Jacob didn't 'win' his wrestling match with the Angel, but here he is spoken of as if he did indeed 'prevail' over God. The power in view was that of God's grace. The very weak 'power' of a baby in the womb is paralleled with the 'power' by which he struggled and prevailed with the Angel (:4). That power was very weak and practically non-existent- it was a function of God's desperate love and sensitivity to him. This was reflected in Hosea's love for Gomer. For true love means weakness and sensitivity to the beloved, and the imputing of rightness. For this reason, Jacob is here counted as having won the wrestling match when he lost it, and as having done in the womb what he could not have done in his own strength.

The idea of the wrestling incident is that the Angel like Esau came out to destroy Jacob because of his deceit- which is a major complaint of God against Israel, and Hosea against Gomer. She cheated, lied, deceived and was immoral. Just as it seems Jacob was by nature from the womb. But through the wrestling incident, he was changed. And thus there was hope for Gomer / Israel, by God's grace. Jacob began life in the womb in a wrestle with Esau, and the Angel represents Esau. For later Jacob admits that that seeing Esau's face "is like seeing the face of God" (Gen. 33:10). We read here in Hosea 12 that Jacob wept to the Angel [a detail not recorded in Genesis]; but in Gen. 33:4 that Jacob wept before Esau. The Angel was indeed Esau's representative, guardian Angel. That's why the Angel tells Jacob that "you have struggled with God [the Angel representing Esau] and with men [Esau, Isaac], and have prevailed". Hosea repeatedly warns that destruction is just around the corner for Israel. The Assyrians / Babylonians are about to pounce, like an eagle hovering above God's house. But Jacob wrestled with the Angel, and ended up getting a blessing, with his life preserved. And in the wrestling, both Jacob and the Angel changed or matured. And so it could have been between God and Israel. The tortured mind of God revealed in Hos. 11:8 was reflected in the Angel whilst wrestling with Jacob. Jacob is alluded to, as he was a deceiver like Gomer / Israel had been. Yet even he came to faith and covenant with God, as Gomer / Israel could do. And just as the

wrestling produced literal intimacy between Jacob and the Angel, so intimacy between God and Israel, as between Hosea and Gomer, could be created. Jacob had been a wrestler from the start; as :3 notes, he had wrestled in the womb. Like Gomer, like Israel, it may have appeared that Jacob by nature, from birth, was born to wrestle and deceive. Thus Israel surrounded Yahweh with deceit (Hos. 11:12), just as Gomer did Hosea. But as Jacob came through that wrestling to intimacy with God, so could Gomer / Israel. Within God there was a struggle between His grace and His judgment, His love and His wrath [so well revealed in Hos. 11], and the pole of His love and grace emerged triumphant. In the same way, Jacob wrestled with the destroying Angel and came to grace and blessing rather than destruction. And so could Israel and Gomer- if they engaged.

The Hebrew word used for wrestling is *abag*, related to the word *yabboq*, the Jabbok river which Jacob crossed to wrestle with the Angel. And these words likewise sound like 'Jacob', *Yaaqob*. The word for "heel" likewise is *aqeb*, and Jacob's first wrestling was with the heel of Esau. In Gen. 33:4, Jacob embraces Esau, and the word *habaq* is used. The wrestling [*abag*] resulted in the intimacy of embrace, *habaq*. Just as it did with the Angel. Literally, the Angel 'yabboq'ed Jacob, he Jacobed Jacob. And yet "struggled with" in "he [Jacob]struggled with" contains the Hebrew letters for "Israel". Jacob 'Israeled' the Angel. This is what it is to be Israel, to struggle with God and attain His grace, as God 'Jacobed' Jacob. We have here a picture of the mutual intimacy achieved through the wrestling.

And in his maturity- We can read this as meaning that he was a grasper in the womb and early infancy, and in his manhood, in his maturity, he was the same. Until he was changed by that night of wrestling. Or the point may be that Jacob's spiritual maturity was in resigning all human strength and clinging on to the blessing of grace. But the Hebrew word really means "strength" and recurs in 12:8, where Ephraim "found myself wealth" in his own strength. Jacob reached spiritual strength or maturity that night. To be that familiar with God that we can reason with Him, struggle with Him in prayer, seek to change His will over an illness or situation... this is spiritual maturity. This whole characteristic of striving with God was memorialized in his new name: Israel, implying 'striver and prevailer with God and men'. And this must be the characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too. There is a confusion in the Hebrew between 'striver' and 'prince'- for the struggle comes before the crown. Our relationship with Him, our attaining of salvation, is a struggle, a wrestling, a desperate, desperate clinging on, a pleading with tears. Yet this is almost the opposite of the spirit of organized religion; a comfortable drifting through life, attending the same round of meetings, largely hearing pleasant platitudes, no tears, no little real self-sacrifice, little realistic self-denial, little self-examination and daily struggle to be the more spiritual in the 'small' things of life, hiding behind the institutionalization of spirituality which denominational history has inevitably resulted in... Yet Jacob that night really is a type of us all. For "there He spoke [keeps on speaking] with us".

He had power with God- The reference to "maturity" could simply be in contrast to how he was as a baby; and "power with God" could just refer to his struggle with the Angel. Hence GNB: "When Jacob grew up, he fought against God". But this rather misses the wider picture presented in Hosea, of a God whose great love for us makes Him vulnerable and open to our prayers and desires, just as Hosea was hopelessly vulnerable to Gomer. The Angel who came to slay Jacob as Esau's representative, as an Angel came to slay Moses, was turned away by Jacob's wrestling in prayer. Esau came out to kill Jacob, but Esau changes his mind, by grace; and so

Jacob comments that as he wrestled close up with the Angel that night, he saw Esau's face in the face of the Angel (Gen. 33:10). Hence the Angel's comment that by holding his own in the wrestling match, Jacob had prevailed with both God and men, i.e. Esau (Gen. 32:28).

Hos. 12:4 *Indeed, he struggled with the Angel*- The AV is better, "had power over". The same word is used in Hos. 8:4 of how Israel "made princes" but not by God. Jacob is being read negatively here. And yet the idea of having power over God was only because God let him win, as a father playing a game with his son. God's love is such that as with any true love, it makes the lover vulnerable, and gives power to the beloved. 'Israel' is the most common title God uses for His people; and it can mean 'one who struggles with God and prevails'. This, therefore, will be the characteristic of all His people. Note the humility of God, the Almighty, in desiring to articulate our relationship with Him in terms of us struggling with Him and winning. Hos. 12:4 seems to emphasize this, by saying that Jacob in his prayer and pleading had power over the Angel. His strength was in his humility; by his strength he had power over God, but it was by his weeping and pleading that he did. This, then, was the true strength 'over' God.

And prevailed- I explained on :3 that God and Esau's intentions towards Jacob were changed by his prayer and repentance; and the Israel of Hosea's day could have done the same, and averted the destruction which was heading for them just as Esau and his men were on their way to destroy Jacob. The idea that God's purpose is signed and sealed unchangeably and the Angels are just putting it into practice militates against our faith in prayer. Jacob "had power over the Angel, and prevailed"- not physically, because the Angel eventually had power over him that way; but spiritually, through his wrestling in prayer, he succeeded. "He wept, and made supplication unto Him... even the Lord God of Hosts (Angels)". Because the Angels do change their mind and God's purpose is in many ways open-ended, we should be greatly encouraged in our prayers. God, like Hosea with Gomer, is open to dialogue and change. The intended judgment and result of sin will not come if we truly repent.

Jacob "prevailed" in that he received the blessing which he didn't deserve, by grace. But this was only after he had been touched in the groin by the Angel. It has been observed: "Three biblical scholars, S. Gervitz, L. Eslinger, and S. H. Smith, also argue that Jacob's injury occurs to his genitals. The *kap yareh*, they point out, refers either to the "hand of the thigh"—the penis, or to the "hollow, pouch-like" scrotum. Citing J. Skinner, L. Eslinger suggests that when Genesis says that Jacob's hip was put out (Gen. 32:25), what it means is that "Jacob had a hernia at the place of the scrotum's attachment to the body in the course of the struggle." This interpretation of Jacob's injury as sexual has far-reaching implications...". He was as it were unmanned, and limped the rest of his life in awareness of that fact. Possibly we could argue that his wasted years with Laban were a result of his sexual list for Rachel, and now this was revealed to him- by one gentle touch of the Angel. This has huge relevance in the Hosea context. Gomer was sexually addicted, and Israel likewise had the spirit of postitution within them, for other gods. The whole story of Jacob's wrestling is introduced to show both Gomer and Israel that they could wrestle there way to a resolution of this. It was after this touch that Jacob clung to the Angel, not in combat, but for dear life, for blessing, for grace, for salvation, clinging now to the

Angel's body until they end up live two lovers rather than opponents. And that is the path of all who are truly Israel.

The whole incident begs so many questions, but this is so that we might analyze it, brood upon it, and come to this conclusion. That God's grace won. We ask the question: "So who won?". And it is hard to answer because the text is intentionally ambiguous. If Jacob merely fought a man and won, it is insignificant. If he wrestled God and won, that is blasphemous. Yet Hos. 12:4 says that Jacob "prevailed" over God. If God won, then we suspect that God must always win and any wrestling with Him was futile and the whole thing was unfairly loaded from the start. The wonder of it is quite enough anyway: "as a man he contended with God". But Jacob didn't see himself as having won. He called the place "Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved"; he had as it were escaped with his life (Gen. 32:31). And yet the Angel disabled Jacob's manhood because "he saw that he could not prevail". Just as Hosea saw with Gomer, and God with Israel at Hosea's time. We are invited to navigate a course of interpretation in between these poles, and this "magnificent defeat" seems the intended conclusion. Jacob was unmanned and 'lost' but thereby attained grace and he "prevailed" against God's intended destruction of him at the hand of Esau. The name given him in commemoration, "Israel", is intentionally enigmatic- it can mean 'Prevailer over God', or 'God prevailed over'. Similarly "He found him at Bethel" is unclear as to who found whom. Because in a sense Yahweh found Jacob, but Jacob found Yahweh. Likewise there is an ambiguity both in Gen. 32 and in Hosea 12:5 as to who "won": "He struggled with the angel; he overcame him". Who overcame whom is left intentionally ambiguous. And this intimacy was possible for Israel, and for Gomer with Hosea. Jacob who by nature was Jacob, a deceiver and struggler with God, was changed to Israel. The nature of Gomer and Israel could be changed, just as Yahweh and Hosea so desperately wished. But they walked away from it. It is for the new Israel to accept the challenge. For "there He keeps on speaking to us".

He wept, and made supplication to him- This is clearly behind the language of Heb. 5:7 about the Lord's desperate prayer in Gethsemane. The Hebrew means 'to bow or stoop towards'. Yet the same word is used in the account of that night of wrestling to record how God was gracious unto / bowed down to Jacob (Gen. 33:11). We encounter here a wonderful mutuality between God and Jacob. Jacob bows down to God, throwing himself upon His grace as Esau approaches him to destroy him; and God as it were bows down to Jacob. This is why Jacob marvels in Gen. 33:11, in reflecting upon that night, that God had bowed down to him. It also explains why the pronouns in these verses in Hosea are ambiguous- it's not altogether clear who is making supplication to whom. This is what happens in genuine reconciliation; each side stoops to the other. God's love is such that it makes Him vulnerable enough to stoop before Israel His beloved. We recall how elsewhere He feels apparently guilty for having as it were forsaken His bride Israel, leaving her as a woman forsaken in her youth (Is. 54:6). He takes blame which He need not have taken at all; but this is what love leads to. And God deeply loves...

God dealt "graciously" (the same word here translated "supplication") with Jacob (Gen. 33:11). At that time, God "recompensed" to Jacob according to his sins, and Jacob responded by "turning" (same word translated "recompensed") to his God (Hos. 12:2,8). By the end of his life, this spirit of mutuality between him and God had become perfected. And so with us; we too can live our lives thinking that if we do this, that and the other, God will do this and that for us. The idea of a two-way

relationship with Him, of His Spirit, with all that implies, dwelling in us, until our will is His will; all this takes time to develop.

He found him at Bethel- God had encouraged Jacob to return from Laban because He was the God of Bethel, i.e. what He had revealed there of His seeking, saving grace, He was going to continue (Gen. 31:13). This is why Jacob later builds an altar in Bethel to the God who had answered his prayers in the “day of my distress”- a reference to Jacob’s prayers on the night he wrestled with the Angel as Esau approached him (Gen. 35:3). So we could fairly interpret “He found him at Bethel” as meaning that God had also found Jacob at Bethel, just as He ‘found’ Him in that night of wrestling. The same Hebrew word translated ‘found’ is used about how Jacob ‘found’ grace before both Esau and God that night (Gen. 32:5). God found Jacob and Jacob found God; another example of mutuality and purposefully ambiguous pronouns. God is in search of man, and yet man is in search of God. When we meet, there is an indescribable mystery of communication, portrayed graphically for all time in Jacob and the Angel hugging each other as the wrestling match dissolves into an intense clinging on to each other, bowing to each other and blessing each other, the essence of Emmanuel, God with us.

The significance of Bethel is that it was where Israel's idol shrine was, and it seems it was there that Gomer worked as a cult prostitute. But there, God was willing to speak with Israel. In the midst of their human strength and humanity, as He had done with Jacob. There, the very location of their faithlessness and treachery, He was willing to speak with them of His grace as He had done with Jacob.

And there He spoke with us- At Bethel, after the night of wrestling, God renewed the covenant with Jacob. Likewise Hosea was asking Gomer to renew their marriage vows, to enter a new covenant, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel urge Israel to do with God. Bethel was where Israel were now worshipping idols; Hosea's point is that in that very place, a spiritually weak Jacob had been found by God and repented. The Angel twice 'found' Jacob in Bethel (Gen. 28:11-19; 35:1). "He spoke with us" in that Hosea's audience could likewise have wrestled with God in prayer and repentance, and avoided the approaching destruction.

Hos 12:5 *Even Yahweh, the God of Armies; Yahweh is His name of renown!*- As explained above, the approach of Esau with 400 men to destroy Jacob was also the approach of an army of Angels, Yahweh of armies, to do likewise. But this was averted by Jacob's desperate prayer and repentance, his clinging on to God. This explains why the title "God of Armies" is used here. The allusion is to the memorial Name of Yahweh; His final personality and Name was expressed through His grace to Jacob despite the struggle within Him and between Him and Jacob, the struggle discussed on Hos. 11:8.

Hos 12:6 *Therefore you also turn to your God-* Hosea's audience could likewise have wrestled with God in prayer and repentance, and avoided the approaching destruction. Biblical history is a living word. The historical incidents, such as Jacob's wrestling with the Angel and obtaining grace, speak directly to us and urge us to act likewise; it is as if we were involved in those historical incidents. Thus David invites us to come and see the works God did at the Red Sea, commenting: “There did *we* rejoice in him” (Ps. 66:5,6). He praises God for saving him in the language of Israel’s Red Sea deliverance, speaking of it as “the day of *my* trouble” (Ps. 86:7,8 = Ex. 15:11). He saw how their circumstances and his were in principle the same; he personalized the Scripture he had read. When Israel kept the Passover, they were to say that this was

the deliverance God had wrought “for *me*” (Ex. 13:8). “You *also* turn to *your* God” as Jacob did in the struggles of *his* life.

Keep grace and justice, and wait continually for your God- These were the two things which Hosea dreamt of as being the basis of his remarriage to Gomer (Hos. 2:19 “I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion”). They were seen by him as the basis of marriage. And so Israel are urged to repent as Jacob did, and like him, focus upon a life of grace and justice in covenant relationship with their God.

Hos 12:7 *A merchant has dishonest scales in his hand. He loves to defraud-* The wonderful potential for intimacy with God, achieving what Jacob achieved despite being wired in a very unspiritual way, was turned down. Israel loved dishonesty and self justification rather than repentance. As noted on :1, the worship of lies, the idols, led Israel to be dishonest in other aspects of life. They deceived the Assyrians as well as their God, and were also dishonest in their business dealings. And they 'loved' this fraudulent life, just as the web of lies spun by Gomer became a lifestyle she loved. The same word for "defraud" is used in Hos. 5:11 of how Ephraim was defrauded; like Jacob before his conversion, the deceiver was deceived, "deceiving and being deceived... worse and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13), just as "he daily lies more and more" (:1). Gomer and Israel were caught up in treating others as they were treated; they didn't allow grace and repentance to break the cycle which was leading them in an ever downward spiral.

"Merchant" is literally 'a Canaanite'. They were like the Canaanites rather than as God's people; hence they are described in Ez. 16:3 as being Canaanites: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite".

Hos 12:8 *Ephraim said, Surely I have become rich, I have found myself wealth-* Alluded to in Rev. 3:17 about the new Israel. The very same words were said by those who later sold Judah into captivity (Zech. 11:5). Gomer and Israel considered good harvests to be a result of their faithfulness to the Baal cult. See on Hos. 9:1. They considered their wealth a sign that they were blessed by both Yahweh and the Baals. But this was wrong on both counts. And it serves to disprove the prosperity Gospel; material wealth is not necessarily a sign of blessing.

In all my wealth they won't find in me any iniquity that is sin- Israel were not without any religious conscience. But they had carefully analyzed their ways of acquiring wealth and concluded that they had not committed any sin. Yet God's comment was that their wealth arose from unjust balances and loving to defraud (:7). But they had carefully worked out a justification for everything which they said left them without sin and guilt. This was casuistic legalism at its worst. Human nature has the propensity to justify anything, and we must bear this in mind in our self-examination. In particular, they considered that "iniquity" and "sin" weren't the same. Thus we could translate: "All my gains do not amount to an offense which is real guilt". It's like excusing our materialisms by saying that yes, they are sins, but... I need not be guilty about them. In Israel's case, they considered their wealth from good harvests to have been the blessing of the Baalim. Their iniquities were indeed to be a source of guilt.

Hos 12:9 *But I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt. I will yet again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the solemn feast-* Having condemned Israel for their deceit and materialism in previous verses, we expect the Divine comment to be of judgment. Instead it is of grace, looking ahead to the day when God will enable them to keep the feast of tents, rejoicing in His grace. In wrath He remembers mercy; always, even in the heat of His despair with Israel, there is the hope that they will repent, and He focuses upon His own dream of their restoration. This is how much God wants human restoration, and His strongest will and blessing is therefore behind our every effort to preach it. The feast of tabernacles or tents kept by the exiles in Neh. 8:17 was a pathetically small attempt by them to fulfil this; the reality was that most preferred to remain in exile.

Hosea spoke in God's Name. He would've known how that Name was a memorial of the characteristics of God, His pity, mercy, forgiveness etc. as outlined in Ex. 33:19. And yet Hosea uses those very words in saying that now, God will not have mercy, pity or forgiveness toward Israel (Hos. 1:6). But Hosea spoke in the Name of Yahweh; and predicted that the Yahweh who had been their elohim from the land of Egypt, would still be their God (Hos. 12:9). In this we see Hosea's personal involvement in the tension of God; for he spoke in God's Name, with all that Name implied. And we too carry that Name, having been baptized into it. And we speak in that Name to this world, bearing within us the same conflict between the reality of future judgment, and the earnest grace of God to save this world.

"I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt" suggests Yahweh had always been their God from their first marriage to Him. But Hosea, in line with God's Spirit, had called Gomer's child "Lo Ammi", I am not yours. But God's love was such that although He said that, in His heart, they were still His people. Even at this late stage of Hos. 12:9 and Hos. 13:4, perhaps many years later in Hosea's hopeless marriage. He never withdrew His love, although salvation is a different question as it has to involve a desire for it by those who are saved.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos. 2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 12:10 *I have also spoken to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets I have used parables-* This may be God's way of trying to back up Hosea's credibility as a prophet, as we will see also in :13. He had always communicated with His people through prophets, starting with Moses and Aaron; and no less was He appealing through Hosea. "Parables" is better "similitudes", literally "I was represented by the ministry of the prophets". Hosea's hopeless marriage with the unfaithful Gomer was the greatest example of this in his day. Everyone would have known of her unfaithfulness; Hosea's love, grace, anger and struggle would also have been the talk of many towns in Israel and Judah. The prostitute and the prophet would

indeed have grabbed everyone's attention. And God says that He was indeed represented by Hosea.

Hos 12:11 *If Gilead is wicked, surely they are worthless. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls-* Gilead and Gilgal were the eastern and western divisions of the ten tribe kingdom. Gomer became barren and therefore, in Hebrew male terms, worthless. But still Hosea loved her and sought to win her heart back to him. Just as Israel were useless for any labour but God still used them and loved them (Ez. 15:2,3).

Indeed, their altars are like heaps in the furrows of the field- The allusion is to the way that stones were gathered out of the fields into piles. This connects with the reference to “Gilead” at the start of the verse; for the same word is used of how Jacob had called the heap of stones marking his departure from Laban ‘galeed’ (Gen. 31:47). Gilead signified "heap of witnesses" and Gilgal "heaping heap". The heap of stones celebrated a covenant; but Israel's covenant was with idols, just as Gomer had covenants with both Hosea and other men.

Hos. 12:12 *Jacob-* The names “Jacob” and “Israel” are often used together to show how God saw the Jacob as Israel, without forgetting he was still Jacob.

Fled into the country of Aram- Just as Jacob had to go into exile to bring about his turning to God, so Israel would have to go into exile towards Aram / Syria, just as Jacob had done.

And Israel served to get a wife, and for a wife he tended flocks and herds- It was God and Hosea who paid so much to get a wife. By their experience in exile, Israel would learn how much sacrifice God had gone to in order to claim them as His own wife. At least, that was the intention; Israel as a whole didn't respond, and we may assume that Gomer likewise didn't. Speaking in the context of Israel's punishment for idolatry (remember, in God's eyes Israel = Jacob), we are told, apparently out of context, that Jacob served for a wife (singular), and for a wife he kept sheep. Yet this is in the context of :2, which says that God would punish Israel for their idolatry, according to their ways. The terrible 14 years of keeping the sheep which their forefather Jacob went through therefore represented their punishment for idolatry. As Jacob *served* for Rachel, so Israel served idols and would have to *serve* those idolatrous nations as an appropriate punishment. Keeping sheep in Gentile lands is the basis of the prodigal parable; the young man who left home, tricked his father, sidled past his hostile elder brother with what he was sure was his inheritance by rights, squandered it, kept sheep, and came back a new man. Clearly the Lord had His mind on Jacob, although that parable is full of reference to prophetic descriptions of the nation of Israel, too. Hos. 12:4-6,12,13 seem to say that Jacob's humiliation at the hands of Laban is a type of the future suffering of Jacob, before their final homecoming.

This idea of servitude because of a woman was so relevant to Hosea. Jacob served 14 years to marry a woman he was madly in love with, although from the get go, through going along with Laban's trickery, she did not much love him. She wanted to die rather than be his childless wife, she blamed God and Jacob wrongly, was addicted to teraphim, lied to her father, gave her children names reflected her seething bitterness, and died in narcissism, wanting to call her last child "Son of my sorrow". But for all this, Jacob devoted his life to her and loved her during her life and reflected that love after her death, in his feelings towards her sons Joseph and Benjamin. Hosea loved Gomer likewise, as God loved Israel.

Hos 12:13 *By a prophet Yahweh brought Israel up out of Egypt*- This is added surely as encouragement to Hosea. Hosea is being likened to a prophet like Moses- which of course is a Messianic title (Dt. 18:15; Acts 3:22). His saving passion towards Gomer was to be understood by him as representative of Messiah's passion for Israel's salvation.

"By a prophet (Moses) the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet (Joshua?) was he preserved [s.w. "keep"]" (Hos. 12:13). Joshua and Moses were working and walking in harmony with an Angel in their work. For an Angel 'brought Israel out of Egypt', and it was an Angel who 'kept' Israel (Ex. 23:20). This shows how prophets and Angels were in tandem with each other. In the work of bringing out and 'keeping' a people for God's Name, we too can have this sense of working in tandem with a guardian Angel every step of the way.

And by a prophet he was preserved- Literally, "kept", as a shepherd keeps his sheep. It is the same word used in :12 for how Jacob kept sheep. Again we see the mutuality between God and Jacob / Israel; they were to keep His sheep, and He would keep them. But the contrast between Jacob and Moses presents Jacob in a poor light. He spent his years keeping sheep for the sake of his infatuation with Rachel. Moses kept the sheep of Israel to guide them to God's Kingdom. This connects with the earlier reference to Jacob's wrestling, where his manhood was disabled, perhaps in reference to his infatuation with a woman, Rachel.

Clearly we are intended to see Moses' mediation as typical of the Lord's. His freewill mediation was the basis of Israel's salvation: "By a prophet (Moses: Dt. 18:18), the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved". This last clause may be a hint that Moses prayed for the gift of life-preserving manna, and thus sustained Israel, all unbeknown to them. Likewise the intensity of his prayers and the supremacy of his willingness to sacrifice himself for them was tragically unknown to them at the time. But the preservation in view may specifically refer to a single incident and not general preservation in the desert; the reference may well be to Moses' prayer for Israel to be forgiven of their idolatry and spiritual adultery against God, when God wished to destroy them and make of Moses a new Israel. This would be very relevant in the Hosea context. See on Hos. 14:4.

It should be noted that Moses as a type of Christ was not the High Priest. He mediated for and thereby "preserved" Israel on a voluntary basis; not because he was under any duty to offer up their prayers or "preserve" them. Indeed, they didn't make any prayers for him to offer up. He pleaded with God for them on his own initiative, rather than being asked by them to do so. And this is the basis of Christ's mediation for us; he pleads for us even when we know not what to pray for, even when we don't realize the need to beseech the Father. Moses' mediation, not so much Aaron's offerings, are the prototype which the New Testament uses to explain the Lord's present work. In the Apocryphal *Assumption of Moses* (1:14), Moses is made to say of God: "He designed and devised me and he prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator". These words are alluded to in a number of NT passages.

The emphasis upon "by a prophet..." was surely to show that through heeding the words of Hosea the prophet, Israel again could likewise be preserved from destruction. He was prepared to try to act as Moses for them.

12:14 *Ephraim has bitterly provoked anger-* Just as Hosea was provoked to anger by Gomer; God "hated" Israel for their rejection of Him (see on Hos. 9:15). We noted on Hos. 11:8 the very deep provocations of feelings within God's heart.

Therefore his blood will be left on him, and his Lord will repay his contempt- As noted on :13, Hosea is as the watchman prophet who is telling Israel what is coming upon them. Their blood is therefore no longer on his head but on theirs, according to the principle of Ez. 33:6-8.

HOSEA CHAPTER 13

Hos 13:1 *When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he became guilty in Baal, he died-* The "trembling" in view here and in Hos. 11:10,11 is trembling in repentance; "When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel" (Hos. 13:1). "Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days" (Hos. 3:5). Humility is the true exaltation. We can deduce that the second half of the verse therefore contrasts such "trembling" with the guilt of Baal worship; and exaltation with death / condemnation. Idolatry was and is therefore rooted in pride, the ultimate root of all sin and barrier to repentance. See on :16. The hoped for, fantasized about trembling in repentance had only been for a moment. Like Gomer, they slipped back to Baal worship.

Hos 13:2 *Now they sin more and more-* See on Hos. 7:4 *Burning*. As noted on Hos. 12:1, Israel were in a downward spiral of sin, portrayed by Gomer's sexual addiction.

And have made themselves molten images of their silver- The reference is to the golden calves of Jeroboam, so "silver" is better understood as 'wealth'. But the word strictly means "money", and is that used of how Menahem and other kings paid silver to the Assyrians rather than trusting in Yahweh (2 Kings 15:20; 16:8; 18:14). This trusting in human strength and personal wealth was effectively idolatry.

Even idols according to their own understanding- The tabernacle was made by craftsmen with God given understanding (Ex. 31:3; 35:31; 36:1 s.w.). The images and idols are presented as a fake tabernacle; it was all idolatry performed in the name of Yahweh worship. And this is our subtlest temptation today.

All of them the work of the craftsmen- There were two calves, but "all of them" sounds as if there were many. There were other shrines established, but it may also be that just as the singular calf in the wilderness was addressed in the plural (Ex. 32:4), here too there was an element of plurality within unity. This was the pagan background for the false doctrine of the Trinity.

They say of them, 'They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calves' - Israel were famed amongst the Gentiles for the calves made by Jeroboam, to which they offered human sacrifice. It was observed as ironic that they kissed in adoration that which they sacrificed their children to. Child sacrifice was typically associated with Baal; but here, to the calves. So again we see that Israel were mixing Yahweh worship with paganism, rather than having shrines for Yahweh and separate shrines for the idols. See on :16.

Hos 13:3 *Therefore they will be like the morning mist, and like the dew that passes away early in the morning, like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the threshing floor, and like the smoke out of the chimney-* Israel threshed themselves (Hos. 10:11), they sowed the wind (Hos. 8:7), chased the wind in going to Assyria for help (Hos. 12:1), and were now driven by the wind in condemnation. The driven chaff is representative of the destruction of the nations around Israel in Dan. 2:35. God's apostate people are "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32) in sharing that same fate. The arising of the sun is understood in Mal. 4:2 as the arising of Messiah at the restoration of the Kingdom. So the idea seemed to be that apostate

Israel would be judged and destroyed, but this would usher in the Messianic kingdom. All this could have happened in some form when the exiles returned. But it was deferred and recalculated until our days.

Hos 13:4 *Yet I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but Me, and besides Me there is no saviour*- As in Hos. 11:1; Ez. 16:22,43 and elsewhere in Hosea, God finds the memory of Israel's youth and the beginning of His relationship with them in the marriage at Sinai (Hos. 8:1) a memory which causes Him great pain. Just as in the breakup of any human relationship, it is the memories of the early days which crack us up. We again see God's humanity and the emotional nature of His being. All of Hosea contains allusion to Hosea's marital relationship with Gomer. "Saviour", "king" and even "your God" were terms which in Hebraic thought were titles for a husband. And yet Israel like Gomer looked to other gods and nations as their saviour. The New Testament presents the Lord Jesus as our "only saviour", Yahshua, Yah's salvation. Any practical, moral or intellectual turning to other saviours is tantamount to adultery. Despite all her adultery, Hosea was still Gomer's husband, just as likewise Yahweh was still Israel's God. They should "acknowledge" or "know" no other; and this too can be understood as a euphemism for the sexual act. To know other gods was adultery.

"Saviour" is 'yasha', from whence Yahoshua, Yah saves, Jesus. Knowing God involves knowing Him as saviour; and a husband is to be trusted as a saviour: "the husband is the head of the wife and Christ is the head of the church- himself being the saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). It is knowing / experiencing Yah's salvation in the Lord Jesus which is to know Him. But Israel like Gomer, saw their salvation as coming from many sources- various Baals, Assyria, Egypt, Yahweh etc.

"I am Yahweh *your God* from the land of Egypt" suggests Yahweh had always been their God from their first marriage to Him. But Hosea, in line with God's Spirit, had called Gomer's child "Lo Ammi", I am not yours. But God's love was such that although He said that, in His heart, they were still His people. Even at this late stage of Hos. 12:9 and Hos. 13:4, perhaps many years later in Hosea's hopeless marriage.

Hosea speaks of how Yahweh is still Israel's God from the land of Egypt (Hos. 12:9,13; 13:4). There, Yahweh had revealed Himself as their "I am", who would always be "I will be" for them (Ex. 3:14; 6:7). But He has stated in wrath that "I am not I AM for you" (Hos. 1:9). But on the other hand, He assures them that He is still just as much "I am" for them. In the Hosea-Gomer drama, Hosea remembered Gomer's apparent love for him when they first met, just as Yahweh remembered Israel's apparent love for Him when they left Egypt ["she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" Hos. 2:15]. The truth was, both Israel and Gomer were unfaithful to their amazing lover even then. Yahweh like Hosea could never actually tear Himself away from being who He essentially was- the One who was "I am" and "I always will be" for His people.

Hos 13:5 *I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought*- Ez. 16 is likewise full of such Divine memories, of how fragile and desperate Israel were in the desert, totally dependent upon Him for food, clothing and water- the very duties of a Hebrew husband toward his wife. Yet Gomer sought these things from her lovers, as explained in Hos. 2. God's 'knowing' of Israel should have resulted in their exclusive 'knowing'

of Him (:4). The knowledge in view is in the Hebraic sense of relationship, not academic knowledge of theological propositions as enshrined in a statement of faith.

Yahweh knew Israel in the desert (:5), but they didn't know / acknowledge Him (:4). It was a relationship where one party loved and was intimate with the other, but the beloved didn't respond with the same intimacy. It is our awkwardness, that we are in a relationship where He loves us more than we love Him.

Hos 13:6 *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted-* As explained on :1, it is pride which leads us away from God and true repentance, and it is material blessing which often leads to pride; and it is humility which exalts before God. Israel "waxed fat and kicked" (Dt. 32:15). As explained on Hos. 2, the parallel was with how Hosea provided Gomer with all she wanted, even giving her his entire wealth, quite simply because he loved her; but she used it on her lovers and idolatry, then claiming that the payment and apparent blessings she received from both her lovers and her idolatry were her own legitimate personal income. Materialism is the reason why men forget their God. So any desire to be rich / wealthy is hereby automatically outlawed for God's people.

Therefore they have forgotten Me- Pride is associated with forgetting God in Dt. 8:14. This is where the prosperity Gospel is so wrong. The more human strength we have, the more likely we are to forget God. It's why most believers have not been given wealth; because God doesn't want us to forget Him.

Hos 13:7 *Therefore I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk by the path-* Lion, leopard, bear and wild beasts (:8) were all elements of Daniel's prophecies concerning the powers who would dominate the land promised to Abraham. But God was behind all those powers. All these beasts are significant because of what they do to Israel; that is the territory and arena of their domination. But they are all acting as it were on God's behalf, like the four beasts of the cherubim. There is no radical evil, evil out of control in the cosmos, with God's people at risk from being dominated by it. God is completely in control, and even the terrible things done to Israel by the beasts are under His total control.

"Lurk" is literally 'to observe' and the Hebrew word is soon used again when we read that God will observe His people for good on their reconciliation and restoration (Hos. 14:8).

Being ravaged by wild animals is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:22). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us.

Hos 13:8 *I will meet them like a bear that is bereaved of her cubs-* "Bereaved" is the same word used of how Zion would be bereaved of her children during the invasions which God would bring (Is. 49:21; Jer. 18:21). God is saying that although He had brought the invasions and was totally identified with them, yet He was also totally identified with Israel in the suffering and pain they would bring. This is the other side to the complaint that God brings suffering into our lives; He does, but He is totally identified with us in that suffering and suffers with us and even, in His Son, for us.

And will tear the covering of their heart. There I will devour them like a lioness, tear them like a wild animal- The language is extreme; but this is the extreme wrath of God at human unfaithfulness to Him, as so often mentioned in Hosea (see on Hos. 11:8; 12:14). The extent of the damage is fatal; surely the idea is that Israel would be killed by this bear. This is the force of Hos. 6:1 (see note there): "He has torn, and He will heal us". That 'healing' was therefore nothing short of a resurrection from the dead, and this was the extent of power available to Israel in the miraculous restoration from exile which God potentially enabled. But Israel for the most part didn't want to know.

God would rend their hearts, like a furious lion. But the same term is used in Joel 2:13 in an appeal for Israel to rend their hearts in repentance. On one hand, the idea is that if they didn't rend their hearts in repentance, then God would rend their hearts in judgment. But as will be developed in Hos. 14, the idea could be that through death, death as a result of Divine judgment, their hearts would at resurrection be as He wanted them.

Lion, leopard, bear and terrible beast sounds like the succession of beasts in Daniel 7 who would dominate Israel, ruling over the earth / *eretz* / land promised to Abraham. God was in and working out His anger through these various powers that would dominate and judge Israel.

Hos 13:9 *You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against Me, against the One who is your help-* As noted on :8, God through the invaders had mortally ravaged Israel, and yet even from that desperate situation, He who had torn could also heal, restore and resurrect (see on Hos. 6:1). But Israel didn't want that help. Or we can read as AV: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help". Here we see grace even beyond grace. Although God had destroyed them through the wild beasts of the invaders (see on :7); yet still He offered them His help. And that amazing offer is there to this day for all Israel.

Hos 13:10 *Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges, of whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes?'* - Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their 'king'. But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the 'king' of his wife. God's appeal was reflected in Hosea's desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: "What then should a king do [for] us?" (Hos. 10:3). She was so selfish that she didn't see anything in it for her... when so much love was being offered to her. We noted on Hos. 9:15 that Israel's desire for a human king was a rejection of God as their king / husband, and had been tantamount to adultery. This verse appears to be spoken to Israel at a time when they have no king (:11). It is hard to determine when that might have been during Hosea's ministry (Hos. 1:1); so this can be taken as a future prophetic word. We note too that Israel's demand for a king as recorded in 1 Samuel graciously omits to record that they also asked for "princes", even though they had already had "judges" raised up by God. They wanted a king and a royal family, to be the equivalent to the Divine "judges" or saviours whom He had raised up. So often the Divine record reflects God's grace.

The AV may be correct: "I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?". Understanding "king" as metaphor for husband, we have a reference to Hosea's desire to truly be Gomer's husband. This is a continued expression of hope for further relationship. But it comes right after the language of

death and total destruction of Israel expressed in the previous verses. The implication is of resurrection in order to achieve that relationship, and this will be stated explicitly in :14 and the idea developed in the next chapter.

"King and princes" are seen as responsible for the state of Judah's downfall. God laments that He has given them a king and princes (Hos. 13:10); they were addicted to alcohol (Hos. 7:3). And so Yahweh says they are to abide many days without a king and princes, so that they might learn faithfulness to Him (Hos. 3:4). He gave them a king and princes, knowing what this would lead to. Unfaithfulness to Him. But we see here how in the end, God gives man what he wants, as He did to the prodigal son. The issue is desiring the right things- His Kingdom and His righteousness.

However the initial reference was to the 10 tribes. They were dissatisfied with the Davidic line and likewise wanted a king; and God gave them Jeroboam. This is probably the initial reference here.

Hos 13:11 *I gave you a king in My anger, and have taken him away in My wrath-* As explained on :10 and Hos. 9:15, Israel's rejection of God for a human king made God "hate" them. It was effectively a divorce from Him; this is how seriously God sees our turning to visible human help rather than to Him. God so respected human freewill decisions that even when His wife wanted to go off with another man, He "gave" her this; and even worked through the system of human kingship in order to continue some level of relationship with Israel, such was His love for them. God sees a connection between His giving of a king, and His taking away of a king. Before they had a king, they were exclusively His. So the taking away of their king was in fact not simply a punishment, but in wrath He remembered mercy, and hoped that this would in fact be the path back towards their accepting Him as their king. So often we see God's hope for restoration expressed within and next to His angry statements of judgment. His anger is therefore unlike human anger; there is always the love which seeks longer term restoration.

Hos 13:12 *The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sin is stored up-* It was stored up within God's memory. Often He seeks to remind Israel that He has not forgotten their sins. There is an assumption that if we forget our sins, then God does too. The passage of time and fading of memory thereby works a kind of pseudo atonement for us. But God remembers, and there has to come some form of judgment. And we must ever consider this in our hearts. Israel's lack of self-examination is quite a theme; see on Hos. 7:2,9.

Hos 13:13 *The sorrows of a travailing woman will come on him. He is an unwise son; for when it is time, he doesn't come to the opening of the womb-* Male Israel are likened to a woman; the rather awkward grammar which is necessary for this to be expressed ["woman... him"] is to flag up the continued connection between Israel and Gomer. But Israel are likened to both the travailing mother, and the baby boy who refuses to be born. The travail of Israel in exile (Jer. 22:23 "how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!") was intended to bring forth new birth, making all her travail worthwhile; and if they had repented, they could have brought forth before they travailed (Is. 66:7). But most of them preferred to remain in exile, to remain within the womb; and those who did return were not spiritually reformed. And so it was pain and suffering all round, as there is in the lives of all those who refuse the birth of the Spirit and are left just with the pains of travail with nothing to show for it (Jn. 3:3-5). They were "unwise"; and

the word is only used again in Hosea in the final appeal of Hos. 14:9 to repent. This was the true wisdom, which would enable the birth of the reborn, restored Israel.

Hos 13:14 *I will ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?*- This is quoted in the New Testament regarding resurrection from the dead at the last day. Resurrection is completely in line with the context here. As noted on :9, He who had torn Israel to the death could also heal, restore and resurrect (see on Hos. 6:1). We noted on :13 that God's intention was that the suffering community in exile would give birth to a man child at the restoration; and Ez. 37 speaks of resurrection to new life at this time. But most of the exiles didn't return, and the child refused to be born (:13). The same was true of the revival of the remnant at the time of Hezekiah; there was no strength to bring forth the child (Is. 37:3). And so this promise of restoration to new life from the dead comes true in the birth of the Spirit in the hearts of a new Israel; for the promises of new life are part of the new covenant intended for the exiles in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And it comes to its final term in the resurrection of the body at the last day. It could be that historical Israel will all be resurrected at the last day, as God somehow forces through His purpose of love with them. Because He does force through at times, over and above human freewill. The wages of sin is death, but still He finds a way, as love does. Israel had been ransomed and redeemed from captivity (Is. 35:10; Jer. 31:11). But although "I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me" (Hos. 7:13). This ransom from death therefore became reapplied to the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus, resulting in our entry of the new covenant, the birth of the Spirit in our cleansed hearts, and finally the resurrection of the body from death. The power of death [its "plagues"] was finally destroyed in the work of the Lord Jesus- these words are clearly alluded to in Heb. 2:14.

Compassion will be hidden from my eyes- AV "repentance". It could be that this is simply saying that although He has changed His mind over things, He would not do so over this. God knows He has changed His position on Israel to and fro, just as Hosea had with Gomer. He says that He will not change again; and yet such is His grace and eternal love for Israel, that He does change again. Or He could be determining as chapter 14 will develop, that He will save them anyway, through resurrection. Likewise we read that "I have purposed it, and will not repent" (Jer. 4:28); and yet God does. Such is His apparent humanity, the depth of His internal struggles between anger and grace, judgment and mercy, hate and love. The fact He as it were comes down on the side of "God is love", upon the pole of grace rather than anger, is not simply because that is how He is. He has come to that position through terrible internal struggle; see on Hos. 11:8.

Hos 13:15 *Though he is fruitful among his brothers, an east wind will come, the breath of Yahweh coming up from the wilderness, and his spring will become dry, and his fountain will be dried up.* - As noted on Hos. 12:1, the east wind was Assyria, whom Israel had once chased after for help, and which would now return as a whirlwind to destroy them. Their armies approached from the desert (1 Kings 19:15). But God was intensely identified with that wind or spirit, it was as it were His very own breath. As noted on :7, the invaders of Israel were all totally identified with Yahweh, and yet He was also absolutely identified with His people in their resultant sufferings. "Ephraim" means 'fruitful'; the idea is that although he has been fruitful, yet he will "become dry". This exactly fits Gomer, who after her marriage to Hosea

bore children to her lovers. We have noted earlier that these children were destined to destruction at the hands of the invaders, and she was cursed with infertility. Her fertility therefore was worthless; "though he is fruitful...".

He will plunder the storehouse of treasure- Perhaps a reference to the kings contemporary with Hosea using the temple treasures to buy off invaders or hire human help. Or the reference could be to the invaders plundering the wealth of Israel and Judah at the invasions; the inscriptions in Sargon's palace at Khorsabad list the treasures taken from Israel. The wealth they had trusted in could not save them, and that is an abiding lesson.

Hos 13:16 *Samaria will bear her guilt; for she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword-* The same word for "guilty" is found in Hos. 10:2, where as noted there, we also have the idea of God in court against His people. Finally, they are guilty. Despite their prayers and religious rituals, they had rebelled against Him, and so must "fall by the sword"- also judgment language. But "guilty" is the word used in :1; they had themselves made themselves guilty, and this final verdict was of their own choice. Sin is its own judgment, chosen by men and only confirmed by God.

'Bearing guilt' is also translated 'atone'. The only atonement for sin is death, to take the wages for sin which is death. So the only way to salvation is through grace, leading to a resurrection from that death. And through identification with someone else who has died that death and yet risen to life again, the Lord Jesus.

Falling by the sword and dashed infants is the language of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 26:25). As Gomer had broken the marriage covenant, so Israel had broken the old covenant. But they were by grace being offered a new covenant- but even that they, and Gomer, refused. And so it was offered to us. And yet there is the message of resurrection for them despite all this death that is to come upon them.

Their infants will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open- Israel had offered their children to Baal and were famed for it (see on :2). Some of the infant slaying rituals involved not only burning the child but also dashing it to pieces. The invaders who "ripped open" the women would themselves be judged for what they did (Am. 1:13 s.w.). But this was all part of the Divine 'tearing' of His people (s.w. Hos. 13:8). Yet even from that, on a communal level, they could be restored- if the remnant repented.

HOSEA CHAPTER 14

Hos 14:1 *Israel, return to Yahweh your God; for you have fallen because of your sin-* Hosea on God's behalf now makes his final appeal. They were to "return" in order to avoid the judgment to come. They didn't, and so from exile they were also to "return" both spiritually and physically to the land of promise to reestablish the kingdom. But most of them didn't want to do that either. They were to accept that their "fall" was due to their sin; whereas Ezekiel was clearly up against the attitude that the exiles thought their punishment was unfair, and they were unjustly suffering the effects of others' sins. Their "fall" was ultimately because of their pride (s.w. Hos. 5:5); this human weakness which is glorified or at best shrugged off by society was what prevented their repentance and brought about their fall.

We are now at the end of Hosea. All his appeals to Gomer, and God's to Israel, have not been responded to. So, she must be judged; but still His saving love is there for her and He still wants it to work. She had dry breasts and a miscarrying womb, an old woman whose sons of adultery had been slain, the old prostitute who has run out of highway. And still Hosea loved her, and still she refused. As with Israel. And so He looks ahead to the day when at resurrection and re-creation, He can love them freely (:5) and their hearts will be for Him. It could be at this time that Israel have already been taken captive to Assyria (:3), hence they are asked to literally 'come back' to Yahweh with words of repentance (:2). Israel have fallen / stumbled because of their sin, they are helpless on the ground unable to rise, apart from by grace. They are as it were "dead", and God's plan therefore involved their literal and spiritual resurrection. "The Lord your God" suggests God from His side has already restored them in His mind. Hosea begins with "I am not your God", I am not Yahweh to you. But now on His own initiative, Yahweh says that He is their God. He begins talking like this in Hos. 12:9; 13:4, leading up to the amazing climax here.

Hos 14:2 *Take words with you, and return to Yahweh. Tell him, Forgive all our sins, and accept that which is good: so we offer our lips like bulls-* Perhaps the intention was that although Hosea knew Israel would go into captivity and be unable to offer sacrifice there, he wanted them to learn there that they could offer their lips and hearts instead of bulls and animal sacrifice. "Accept that which is good" is AV "receive us graciously". They were to cast themselves upon His grace, as their father Jacob had done (Hos. 12). What God wanted was not the bulls of animals sacrifice, but broken and contrite hearts expressed in words of repentance. By being cut off from a temple and sacrificial system, their judgment actually encouraged them towards this. We too may find ourselves cut off from the externalities of church and religious life for whatever reason; that we might make this same intended journey. Again, as earlier in Hosea, we have God's fantasy that His people would say these words. Just as Hosea fantasized about Gomer's return and repentance.

"Take words with you" alludes to taking sacrifices to the sanctuary so that the people "do not appear before the Lord empty" (Ex. 23:15; Ex. 34:20); they were not to come to Him taking nothing with them. But all they could take was their words of repentance. They had broken the old covenant, they had no sacrifices to offer, they would be in captivity far from the temple or other ways of offering animal sacrifices. But the required sacrifice was repentance and declaration of loyalty to Yahweh.

Literally, "we will repay as young oxen our lips". The idea was that they would present the prayers of their lips as thank offerings. The word translated "repay" or "offer" is applied to the sacrifice offered in fulfilment of a vow (Dt. 23:22; Ps. 22:26; 50:14), and young oxen, were used for thank offerings (Ex. 24:5). Their statement of repentance was to be a thank offering. Because they had been forgiven without

repentance, they were to repent, just as the Lord ate with sinners in order to bring them to repentance. And these words in the LXX are applied to us all in Heb. 13:15 ["the sacrifice of our lips, giving thanks to His name"].

Hos 14:3 *Assyria can't save us. We won't ride on horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods!'* - They were to recognize that absolutely no human help could save them. They had asked Egypt for help before (2 Kings 17:3,4), and that assistance was likely imagined in terms of horses and chariots. But they were to totally reject any human strength. All their idols were likewise a trust in the works of their own hands. And here we see the relevance to us, we who do not have literal idols of wood and stone. Quite simply, any trust in our works, money, wealth or health is idolatry. The horses allude to Egypt. They were to recognise that neither Assyria nor Egypt could save. Is. 30:16 records their attitude: "No, but on horses will we flee... And on swift steeds will we ride".

For in You the fatherless finds mercy- See on 14:8 *From Me you will acquire fruit.* The prophecies of judgment and destruction consistently imply that there would be reformation and restoration arising out of those experiences. This was evidently not for those who were slain, but for the survivors and the orphans of the next generation. They would "find mercy", they would become the "Ruhamah" arising as it were as the resurrected form of Lo-Ruhamah, 'not finding mercy', the name of one of Gomer's adulterous sons who was to be slain by the invaders (Hos. 1:6; 2:4). Hosea had at one point disowned Gomer's sons whom she claimed were his, calling one "not my people". They the fatherless would "find mercy" in that Hosea would accept them, as God would accept Israel back. And so the prophecy links back to its beginning. A repentant Israel were intended to "find mercy" when they returned from captivity (Dt. 30:3; Is. 14:1; 49:10; 54:8; Jer. 30:18; 33:26). But most of them didn't want to return. This is the tragedy. And so the promise comes to be reapplied to those of our day who accept the new covenant in repentance, and "find mercy" both now and at judgment day (Is 60:10; 2 Tim. 1:18), and especially to repent Israel of the last days (Ez. 39:25; Rom. 11:31). Mercy being shown to those who had not found mercy (Hos. 2:23) is applied to Christian believers today (Rom. 11:30).

Hos 14:4 *I will heal their waywardness-* Israel are portrayed in Hosea as having an endless, insatiable psychological proclivity towards other gods, just as Gomer became a sex addict. The healing in view is therefore psychological; it is the gift of a holy spirit, a new psychology and worldview. But here we see God's love. Hosea tried all he could to make Gomer love him and be faithful- and failed. But despite divorcing Israel, the God who unlike Hosea can do all things, simply says that He will *make* them faithful. By His Holy Spirit working upon their spirit, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel later explain. Ps. 80:19 asks God to take this initiative: "Turn us again, Yahweh God of Armies. Cause Your face to shine, and we will be saved".

Healing is a major theme in Hosea. The other nations [cp. Gomer's lovers] could not heal Israel (Hos. 5:13), but Yahweh could, if they repented (Hos. 6:1 "Let us return / repent to Yahweh and He will heal us"). But He was hindered in that by their refusal to accept that healing (Hos. 7:1). The healing was in fact potentially done- they just had to accept it: "they didn't know that it was I who healed them" (Hos. 11:3), they refused to accept it. Finally God simply states in Hos. 14:4 "I will heal their waywardness ["backsliding", "disloyalty"], I will love them freely", and they would again be fruitful. For Him. Despite 'healing' being predicated upon repentance (e.g. Jer. 3:22 "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness",

Ps. 30:2 "I cried to You [in repentance] and You healed me", Is. 6:10 "Understand... convert... and be healed"). It's as if God scraps even that basic requirement and wants to force through His desire for them to have a heart for Him; just as Hosea fain would have done this to the heart of Gomer but lacked the power to do so. Just as so many unrequited lovers would do for the object of their love.

In Hosea 2, Yahweh and Hosea offer their women a remarriage under a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. The offer of a new covenant in Ezekiel and Jeremiah involves the gift of a new heart to God's people, His spirit, His mind, a heart solely for Him. Jer. 3:22 is clear: "Return [repent], O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness". "I will restore... I will heal you... I will heal them and reveal unto them the abundance of peace [with God]" (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). The wonder of Jer. 30:12-15 is that the wounds which are "incurable" would be healed by God. He could do the psychologically impossible, through the gift of His spirit which would accompany the new covenant. This is available to us who have accepted the new covenant today. It's why and how believers are psychologically transformed.

This is the same idea as in Hos. 14:4. Their disloyalty would be healed, their unfaithful mind would be changed. We are helped to understand this by the Hosea-Gomer situation. He desperately wanted her to love him, to have a heart for him, and not constantly looking at other men and committing adultery. It was His hope that she would one day love him, and he would do anything to give her such a heart. Israel had a heart for the idols and not for Yahweh, just as Gomer is presented as a sex addict who is mentally enslaved to her addiction. But Yahweh earnestly wanted to heal their heart. This is Hosea's form of the offer of a new heart and spirit to Israel, which was part of the new covenant offered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That healing is offered to Israel, but they refuse. Until at the very end, in Hos. 14:4, God seems to as it were force through His plan with them. We who have willingly signed up to the new covenant have even more ample access to this spirit. If we want it- we will be given it. And we potentially have it.

I will love them freely- See on Hos. 9:15 *Love them no more*. The rent in God's heart between anger and love, judgment and mercy, His internal struggle (Hos. 11:8), comes down finally on the side of loving them freely, despite feeling at times that He could "love them no more" (Hos. 9:15). But the simple truth that "God is love" or "God loves Israel" was arrived at after the Divine struggles of heart and emotion which we cannot really enter into; although we see them reflected in Hosea's struggles of emotion over Gomer.

The free love of God means just that, love without even the condition of loyalty or repentance. He will be able to do so because His spirit has made them acceptable and loving and faithful to Him. Here we see the final resolution of the human problem, in all its moral, ethical and intellectual dimensions- of "How can man be just / right with God?", how can God "be" with us who are so weak and sinful. For all the clever explanations of Paul in Romans, we are left with the fear this is all a clever workaround. How can man be right with God. The answer is really in one word, "love". God forcing through the relationship, even through resurrection and imposed transformation, so that it works. How could Hosea get right with Gomer, how could Yahweh with Israel. Israel who had so sinned, we who have so sinned, can experience the "free" love of God because He will transform us. This is why we go on to read of the blessing of the Spirit. Yahweh will be to Israel a refreshing, enlivening dew (as He will be at the resurrection, "Your dead shall live; my dead body also shall arise.

Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast forth her dead", Is. 26:19), leading to blossom. Resurrection has been in view in Hos. 13:14 "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?". The true Israel will be resurrected and changed; "we shall be changed... we shall be like Him". Oh how rich the promise. Resurrection and transformation by the Spirit was the only way to save Israel / Gomer, and ourselves. We won't get there it seems now. As Gomer had to die, Israel had to go into captivity and their sons fall by the sword in the land of the enemy, so we too must die; the wages of sin have to be death. But the answer is resurrection and transformation. We wonder at Paul's abandon of praise after reflecting that "And so all Israel shall be saved". The glory he speaks of is in their salvation by grace, not simply unity between Jew and Gentile. Possibly he entertains the view that indeed all historical Israel shall be raised, have unGodliness purged from Jacob until they become "Israel", and thus be eternally saved; even though that would on one hand contradict the clear teaching that salvation is only in Christ and there is no life outside of Him. But we are dealing here with a truly amazing grace beyond even Paul's ability to comprehend. And if so, Hosea will then have Gomer as he dreamt of her.

The 'free' love of God matches "the glorious liberty of God's dear children" which Paul speaks of. Intimacy on both sides. We too will love Him freely, without the fear of sin, the perception of the barrier that divides, and the cloud which so easily and quickly comes betwixt God and man. The word for "free" is usually used about the freewill offerings. This is our response even now to the "free" love of God. The same word occurs in Ps. 110:3, again with the ideas of dew, resurrection and future transformation: "Your people will offer themselves willingly [s.w. "free"] in the day of your power, in holy attire. Out of the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth".

We notice the seven "I will..." statements here, as if Yahweh, who had initially said "I will not be [Yahweh]" to His people, now "is" Yahweh again: "*I will bring my people back to me. I will love them freely; I will no longer be angry with them. I will be to the people of Israel like rain in a dry land.. I will answer their prayers ... Like an evergreen tree I will shelter them; I will be the source of all their blessings*".

For My anger is turned away from him- The same words are used of how Moses turned away God's anger from Israel by his intercession and spirit of self-sacrifice (Ex. 32:12; Ps. 78:38). Israel's "preservation" by Moses has been alluded to earlier; see on Hos. 12:13. The mediator figure who ultimately does this is the Lord Jesus. God did not turn away His anger from Judah (2 Kings 23:26; Jer. 4:8) at that time; but He ultimately will, due to the work of the Lord Jesus. For man is only saved from wrath through Him, Paul teaches. So God is looking ahead to how things shall finally be, when His Son has atoned for Israel and His wrath is turned away, and He can love them freely. Hence Paul's implication that Israel shall be resurrected, ungodliness purged from Jacob so that Jacob becomes Israel. And so all Israel shall be saved. The natural sense is that "all Israel" means all Israel, and not 'Christ- believing Jews plus Gentile believers'. At the very least, we can conclude that all any of "Jacob" need to do is to say "yes" to the covenant and to take words of sorrow and repentance with them to God, and they shall be saved. All we have to do is say yes...

Hos 14:5 *I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, and send down his roots like Lebanon-* For Israel to be as a flourishing tree, it had to be planted.

The idea was that the people of God would return from captivity and be planted in the land of Israel permanently, where they would become a blessing to the nations around them (:7). It is at the time of the restoration, the new covenant and the Kingdom of God that Israel will be planted. "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked

up from their land which I have given them" (Am. 9:15); "I will bring them back to this land... I will plant them and not uproot them" (Jer. 24:6); "In the time to come Jacob shall take root and Israel shall bud and blossom and they shall fill the whole earth with fruit" (Is. 27:6). Clearly God's hope for reconciliation with His people, as Hosea's for Gomer, was now not in this life. It is the resurrection [already spoken of in Hos. 13] and the Kingdom that is in view. And yet this was despite their impenitence, leading us to ponder whether Paul's understanding that "so all Israel shall be saved" could imply the resurrection and spiritual cleansing of historical Israel. Unless we fall back to the assumption that those who will be thus planted eternally in the earth and saved are those who heed the calls to repentance. But that doesn't exactly fit the context. Of course we stand here at the very frontier of human possibilities to understand.

"Like the lily" refers to the white lily, which is very common in Palestine, "which is unsurpassed in its fecundity, often producing fifty bulbs from a single root" (Pliny). The picture is of fruitfulness. Gomer was an old, barren woman, still loved by Hosea, despite having "dry breasts and a miscarrying womb". It might seem it was now too late for her and Hosea to have the family and relationship Hosea had hoped for. It may seem too late for God and Israel, for Him and us. But now we have the language of fertility, joy and blessing, brought about only by His Spirit. That Spirit must be received. But even then, we have the implication that God will almost force it upon His people. He so wants to make it work.

Hos 14:6 *His branches will spread, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon-* The language of branches providing shade (:7) is that of the restored Kingdom of God, providing shade and blessing to the surrounding world; Ephraim would indeed have fruitful branches (Gen. 49:22). This could have come true after the return from exile (Ez. 17:8,23), but it didn't. The few who returned mixed with the nations, traded with them and in spirit became like them. They were not a blessing to them. And so the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the work of the Lord Jesus and His future Kingdom on earth (Mt. 13:32), through which the Kingdom of Israel shall be reestablished (Ez. 21:25-27).

The language of blossoming and fruitfulness in :6,7 are taken from marriage blessings common at the time. Still the Divine dream, as Hosea's for Gomer, was that despite the divorce, the judgments, the shame... still, somehow, the remarriage and reconciliation would happen. Even if it required thousands of years of death followed by resurrection.

"Branches" is literally 'saplings', the idea being of a slender plant growing up from the root of the cut down tree. The same word is used of the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:2 "tender branch"). The hint is that through resurrection, and on account of Messiah, the condemned, dead Israel would rise again. These branches / saplings are of an olive tree. The judgment of Jer. 14:16 would be reversed through resurrection: "Yahweh called your name, A green olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken". They would be as originally intended. But the question of course is whether the actual unfaithful Israelites, like Gomer, would be resurrected and thus transformed; or whether this

comes true only through a new olive tree, the believers. The logical force of the argument here in Hosea is that those who were slain in judgment by Assyria and Babylon would arise, as if historical Israel were to be resurrected. That begs many questions, only resolvable by the acceptance of God's love and grace.

Hos 14:7 *Men will dwell in his shade. They will revive like the grain, and blossom like the vine. Their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon-* As noted on :6, this is the language of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. The branches of natural Israel were broken off, and we have been grafted in (Rom. 11:21). Right now, we should be a shade to people from all nations through sharing the gospel of the Kingdom with them. The 'revival' could have happened in the time of Hosea (see on Hos. 6:2). But the Israelites wanted to sleep with the Gentiles, pay them for help, deceive them and fight with them, as Hosea has explained already- rather than be a shade to them, an attractive scent to them, and giving them a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. So much potential was wasted, as it is in human life to this day. It could have happened at the restoration (Jer. 31:5,12 use similar language), after Judah's 'death' in captivity. But most of them didn't want to return, and Malachi and Haggai explain that this fruitfulness didn't happen because they just didn't want the new covenant offered.

The language of fruitfulness here implies the restoration of the grain, wine and oil. God had laid waste their vines (Hos. 2:1). The judgments were all to be reversed. These were all blessings associated with faithfulness to the covenant (Dt. 7:13, 11:14; Jer. 31:12). The idea is that they have returned to covenant relationship, but under a new covenant, seeing they broke the old covenant. This is was all hinted at earlier- if Israel like Gomer were faithful: "The earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow him for myself in the land" (Hos. 2:22,23). But here Hosea speaks as if these things will happen, regardless of the condition of repentance and loyalty to the covenant. God implies He is going to force it through. But I suggest what is implied is resurrection from the dead and transformation by the Spirit.

Hos 14:8 *Ephraim, what have I to do any more with idols?*- The idea may be that Ephraim will say this in repentance, and God responds. But we can also read it as God's address of Ephraim. As I have noted often, Israel were not so much building shrines to idols, but building altars to Yahweh and claiming that their idolatry there was in fact Yahweh worship. God for all time is marking that separation. No longer will His people serve their flesh under guise of serving Him.

I will answer, and will take care of him- Literally, I will show My face. God had turned His face away from Israel (Dt. 31:17), now He will look toward them in response to their exclusive, whole hearted commitment to Him.

I suggest that here we have a dialogue as God and Israel fall in love:

Ephraim: What have I to do with idols?

Yahweh: It is I who answer and look after you.

Ephraim: I am like an evergreen cypress.

Yahweh: from Me comes your fruit.

I am like a green fir tree- from Me you will acquire fruit- The dried up tree of Israel would become God's own tree, and would again produce fruit; even though green fir trees don't produce fruit but only seeds. But this one would give fruit, by a miracle. Instead of worshipping evergreen trees in the hope of fertility blessings, they would worship Yahweh alone, and receive fertility from Him. This is perhaps Hosea's fantasy that somehow, this worn out woman with dry breasts and a miscarrying womb

(Hos. 9:14) would somehow one day still bear him children of their own, and that in him "the fatherless [a reference to Gomer's illegitimate children] finds mercy" (14:3). Those children had been slain, but would find mercy in that they would be resurrected. For how else could slain children "find mercy". This fantasy of Hosea's, rooted in his amazing love for Gomer, love that was partly in pure and amazing obedience to God's *command* that he love her (Hos. 3:1), is a reflection of God's dream for Israel; His hope for Israel, which is "the hope of Israel". Such love and grace is in the background of that term. Hosea died with his dream unfulfilled. We are left with the question as to whether this similar loving intention of God for Israel will in fact be fulfilled, or whether it was what was potentially possible for Israel; or whether His fantasy for them will be fulfilled through a new Israel. If the latter, and we are that new Israel, then we can imagine what passionate joy the Father finds in our bumbling attempts to respond to Him and be His loyal and faithful wife. Whatever, the simple fact is that it all reflects an amazing grace, an ineffable love... and this God is our God, and Hosea who reflected all this is truly a pattern for ourselves in daily life.

Hos 14:9 *Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of Yahweh are right, and the righteous walk in them; but the rebellious will stumble in them-*

The appeal to "know" Yahweh is yet again repeated. "She did not know that it was I who gave her grain, wine, and oil" (Hos. 2:8), she was destroyed for lack of knowledge of Yahweh, and yet always was the hope, the fantasy, of Hos. 2:20: "I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know Yahweh". This was God's hope as it was Hosea's, that Gomer would finally know him in all the fullness of intimacy that he hoped for. But despite the intensity of Divine hope, of Hosea's hope, there had to be that freewill movement. Hence this final, forlorn appeal.

Walking in the ways of Yahweh is the language of keeping covenant (Dt. 8:6; 10:12; 11:22,28; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; 31:29). Verse 1 has begun by saying that Israel have indeed stumbled, they are the rebellious, but by grace God will resurrect them literally and spiritually from that fallen position. God's amazing grace and willingness to save Israel 'anyway', however we understand that in its practical outworking, should inspire us to be loyal to the covenant. The wise will perceive that, rather than using grace as an excuse for sin and disloyalty to that covenant. Despite the hint at Israel's resurrection and transformation by the Spirit, either literally or at the proposed restoration which most of them refused, Hosea cannot conclude without some kind of notice about the conditionality of God's grace- even if those conditions may be waived. Even if there were to be unconditional universal salvation for "all Israel", then the conditionality of salvation must never be ignored. That is the abiding and concluding paradox we are left with by Hosea, by God, by His grace and love. It is the tension left between "I will love them no more" and "I will love them freely". To press further is to try to look beyond the veil. On the intellectual, exegetical level... we are now at a brick wall. Lead there by following the line of reasoning and language of Hosea. We cannot say more. Nor really think more. But somehow, "so all Israel shall be saved".

In the light of this, the true 'prudence' or wisdom was to repent; that was the true understanding. But Israel were not wise and so the exiled community didn't come to rebirth (see on Hos. 13:13). The very existence of such passionate love for us, love beyond reason, carries with it an inevitable warning as to our responsibilities. Faced as we are by a love like this, we simply can't be passive to it. We shall either stumble, or walk in this love.

Zion's King shall reign victorious,
All the earth shall own His sway;
He will make His Kingdom glorious;
He will reign through endless day:
What though none on earth assist Him!
God requires not help from man,
What though all the world resist Him!
God will realise His plan.

Nations now from God estranged,
Then shall see a glorious light;
Night to day shall then be changed,
Saints shall triumph in the sight.
See the Papal idols falling!
Worshipped once, but now abhorr'd;
Men on Zion's King are calling;
Zion's King by all adored.

Then shall Israel, long dispersed,
Mourning seek the Lord their God ,
Look on Him whom once they pierced,
Own and kiss the chastening rod,
Then all Israel shall be saved,
War and tumult then shall cease,
While the greater Son of David
Rules a conquer'd world in peace.

3. Daughter of Zion, the power that hath saved thee,
Extolled with the harp and the timbrel shall be;
Shout: for the foe is destroyed that enslaved thee;
Th' oppressor is vanquished, and Zion is free. [Chorus]