

Hosea

The Words of a Prophet

by Robert J. Neral

A Study of Hosea

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A STUDY OF HOSEA

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# INTRODUCTION: THE MAN, THE MOMENT, AND THE MESSAGE

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There are books of the Bible that we read to learn facts about God. And then there are books of the Bible that pull us in close and let us feel His heart.

Hosea is one of those books.

Before we read a single word of prophecy or judgment, before we encounter any of the dramatic imagery that fills these pages, we are introduced to a man — a real man, with a real life and a real marriage — whose personal story was chosen by God to be the sermon. Not a sermon he would preach. A sermon he would live.

That is where we begin. Not with theology. With a man named Hosea.

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## WHO WAS HOSEA?

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The opening verse tells us what we need to know:

"The word of the LORD 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." (Hosea 1:1)

Four kings of Judah are named here. One king of Israel. I want you to stop and count what that means.

Uzziah reigned for fifty-two years. Jotham for sixteen. Ahaz for sixteen. Hezekiah for twenty-nine. That is well over a century of history covered by those four names. Hosea's ministry was not a brief flash of prophetic fire — it was a sustained, decades-long calling. God did not send him with one message and then release him. He kept speaking through Hosea year after year after year.

Why does that matter to us?

Because it tells us something about the nature of God's patience. He did not send one prophet, receive one rejection, and walk away. He kept sending. He kept speaking. He kept reaching. Hosea's long ministry is itself a testimony to the longsuffering heart of God.

The name Hosea is also worth noting. It comes from the same Hebrew root as the name Joshua — and as the name Jesus. It means salvation. The man God chose to carry this message of judgment and restoration bore, in his very name, the promise of what God intended to do.

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THE WORLD HOSEA WALKED INTO

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To understand Hosea's message, we need to understand his world. And his world was a nation in the final stages of a long spiritual collapse.

It had not always been this way.

There was a time when all twelve tribes of Israel stood together as one nation under one God. The high point of that unity came under King David — a man after God's own heart — and was extended under David's son Solomon, who built the great Temple in Jerusalem where the presence of God dwelt among His people.

But Solomon's brilliance came at a terrible price. He taxed the people heavily. He gave away Israelite land to pay foreign debts. He pressed ordinary men into forced labor. And — most fatally — he married foreign wives who brought their foreign gods into the heart of the nation.

"For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God." (1 Kings 11:4)

When Solomon died, the dam broke. His son Rehoboam came to the throne promising to be even harsher than his father. The ten northern tribes had heard enough. They refused. They revolted. And from that day forward, the nation that God had built was split in two.

In the north: the kingdom called Israel, with its capital in Samaria.

In the south: the kingdom called Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem.

These two kingdoms remained separate for over two hundred years. And the history of those centuries — told faithfully in the books of Kings and Chronicles — is one of the saddest records in all of Scripture. King after king led his people further from God. Idols multiplied. False prophets flourished. The Law of Moses was forgotten, then ignored, then mocked.

I want you to think about something here. When the people of Israel had first asked for a king, back in the days of the Judges, God Himself told Samuel what was really happening:

"Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me,

that I should not reign over them." (1 Samuel 8:7)

From the very beginning, the desire for a human king was a rejection of the divine King. Samuel warned them. He told them plainly what a king would cost them — their sons for his armies, their daughters for his kitchens, their fields for his treasury. They heard every word and said: give us a king anyway.

What Samuel warned would happen, happened. Every word of it.

And it is into this broken, exhausted, spiritually bankrupt world that God sends Hosea — with the most unusual assignment any prophet in Scripture ever received.

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THE ASSIGNMENT NO PROPHET EXPECTED

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When God called the prophets, He usually gave them a message. Words to speak. A vision to describe. A letter to write. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. Jeremiah felt the word of the LORD like a fire shut up in his bones. Ezekiel lay on his side for days as a living object lesson.

But what God asked of Hosea was something different. Something more personal. Something that would cost him more than words ever could.

"When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD.'" (Hosea 1:2)

Go. Marry a woman who will be unfaithful to you.

Let that land on you for a moment.

God was not asking Hosea to preach about unfaithfulness. He was asking Hosea to experience it — to carry it in his own chest, to feel it in his own home, to know what it is to love someone who walks away. Because that is exactly what God was feeling. And there was no sermon in the world that could communicate it the way a lived story could.

Hosea obeyed.

*"So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim."
(Hosea 1:3)*

Three words: he went and obeyed. No argument. No negotiation. No "but LORD, what will people think?" He went.

And Gomer — whoever she was before this marriage — would become the most famous unfaithful wife in the history of Scripture. Not because her story was unique, but because her story was Israel's story. Her wandering was their wandering. Her return — and she would return — was the return God was promising to His people.

That is the genius of the book of Hosea. God did not just write theology about covenant faithfulness. He wrote a marriage. He wrote a human life. And He asked one faithful man to live it out so that a generation who could no longer hear abstract words might finally feel the weight of what they had done to their God.

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HOW TO READ THIS STUDY

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As we walk through the book of Hosea together, I want to encourage you to read slowly.

This is not a book to be rushed. Every chapter carries weight. Every image — the wayward wife, the children with names that break your heart, the thorns in the path, the valley of hope, the dew and the lily, the green cypress tree — every image is chosen by God for a reason.

Ask yourself as we go: What is God feeling in this passage? What is He saying to Israel — and what is He saying to me?

Pastor Robert has spent decades studying this book, sitting with rabbis, reading the Hebrew Scripture from beginning to end, and one thing has become clear: God does not change. The God who pursued Israel through Hosea is the same God who pursues every wandering heart today.

The question Hosea asks — in every chapter, in every image, in every promise — is always the same question:

Will you return?

Let us find out together what it means to say yes.

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# **SECTION ONE: THE MARRIAGE OF HOSEA — GOD'S LOVE IN HUMAN FORM**

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We ended our introduction with God's unusual assignment to Hosea: go, marry a woman who will be unfaithful to you. In this section, we walk slowly through the first three chapters of Hosea — the most intimate chapters of the book — where that marriage unfolds before us.

As we do, I want us to hold two stories in our minds at the same time. The first story is Hosea and Gomer. The second story is God and Israel. They are the same story. Hosea and Gomer's marriage is not an illustration of God's relationship with Israel — it is a living enactment of it. God designed it that way from the beginning.

Let us read carefully.

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## **THREE CHILDREN, THREE NAMES, ONE MESSAGE**

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Hosea married Gomer, and three children came from that household. Each child received a name — not a family name, not a name chosen for tradition or sentiment, but a name chosen by God. And each name carried a piece of the message God was sending to Israel.

The first child, a son:

"Then the LORD said to him: 'Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.'" (Hosea 1:4-5)

The name Jezreel was heavy with memory. It was in the Valley of Jezreel that Jehu had shed blood — violent, brutal blood — to seize the throne of Israel. God had used Jehu's zeal at the time, but the violence had not been forgotten. A day of reckoning was coming. The military power of the northern kingdom — its bow, its armies, its defenses — would be broken in that same valley where the trouble began.

Every time someone in Israel called that child's name, they were speaking a prophecy.

The second child, a daughter:

"Then God said to him: 'Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the LORD their God.'" (Hosea 1:6-7)

Lo-Ruhamah. The name means No Mercy. Not "less mercy." Not "delayed mercy." No mercy.

I want you to feel the weight of that for a moment. This is not a God who has grown mildly irritated. This is a God who has extended mercy for generations — through the desert wanderings, through the period of the Judges, through the long years of the divided kingdom — and who is now declaring that the account is closed for the northern kingdom.

Notice also the distinction God makes here. He removes mercy from Israel — the northern kingdom — but He says He will still have mercy on Judah, the southern kingdom. Why? Because Judah still had the Temple. Judah still had the Davidic line of kings. The southern kingdom would fall eventually too, but not yet. God was distinguishing between the two halves of the divided nation.

The third child, a son:

"Then God said: 'Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I will not be your God.'" (Hosea 1:9)

Lo-Ammi. Not My People.

That is the most devastating name of the three. Because "My people" was one of the central declarations of the covenant. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He said: you are My people, and I am your God. That phrase ran like a golden thread through the entire relationship between God and Israel. To say "Not My People" was to say: the covenant is broken. The relationship as it has been is over.

These three children — Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, Lo-Ammi — were walking prophecies. Every morning when Gomer called them to breakfast, she was reciting a message from God to the nation. Every neighbor who heard their names heard the verdict of heaven.

And yet — God could not stop with the verdict. Even here, even in the naming of judgment, grace broke through.

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GRACE BURIED IN THE JUDGMENT

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Immediately after naming the third child — immediately after declaring "Not My People" — God said this:

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' there it shall be said to them, 'You are sons of the living God.'" (Hosea 1:10)

Do you see what happened there? God pronounced the judgment and then, in the very next breath, spoke of a future restoration so great that the rejected people would one day be called sons of the living God.

The Apostle Paul saw this. When he wrote to the Romans about God's faithfulness to Israel, he quoted this very verse — because it showed that even in the moment of Israel's rejection, God was already planning their restoration.

"Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; and they shall come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel!" (Hosea 1:11)

Notice the shift in that last word. The valley of Jezreel was named for bloodshed and judgment in verse four. But here in verse eleven, the word Jezreel itself is transformed — great will be the day of Jezreel! The place of judgment will become the place of gathering. The name that carried death will carry life.

That is the nature of our God. He redeems not just people — He redeems names. He redeems histories. He takes the very thing that was marked by failure and turns it into a testimony of His grace.

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THE WAYWARD WIFE — CHAPTER TWO

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Chapter two shifts the tone. God speaks now not just about Israel in the third person — He speaks directly, and the imagery becomes more intense. The wayward wife stands at center stage, and we understand now beyond any doubt that the wife is Israel herself.

*"Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born." (Hosea 2:2–3)*

These are strong words. Some readers find them jarring. But let us understand what God is expressing here. This is not the cold language of a judge reading a verdict. This is the language of a wounded husband — a husband who gave everything, who loved faithfully, who provided abundantly, and who watched his wife leave anyway.

Why did she leave? Listen to her own reasoning:

*"For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.'" (Hosea 2:5)*

She believed her daily needs — food, clothing, oil, drink — were coming from her lovers. From the nations around her. From the Baals and the idols and the foreign alliances. She had forgotten a fundamental truth, and God named it plainly:

"God is saying here that instead of trusting Him for their subsistence, they look to the world, which can only disappoint."

That is the root failure. Not a dramatic rebellion. Not a conscious rejection. Just a slow, gradual forgetting — a drifting toward whatever was visible and immediate, while the invisible Provider was slowly pushed to the edges of their thinking.

I encourage you to stop and ask yourself: Is there any area of my life where I have done the same? Where I have looked to the world — to money, to relationships, to accomplishment, to security — to provide what only God can give?

Because this is not just Israel's story. This is the story of every human heart that has ever been tempted to trade the living God for something that feels more immediate.

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## THE GOD WHO BUILDS WALLS OUT OF LOVE

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What does God do when His people run after false lovers? He does not simply step back and let them go. He builds a wall.

*"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.'" (Hosea 2:6–7)*

I want you to think carefully about what God is doing here. He is not punishing Israel for the sake of punishment. He is creating the conditions for her return. The thorns in the path are not cruelty — they are love wearing a difficult disguise.

Think of it this way. When a child runs toward a busy road, a loving parent does not simply call after them and hope for the best. They put up a fence. They block the path. They do whatever is necessary to keep the child from reaching something that will destroy them.

God is doing exactly that for Israel. Every false path is being closed. Every lover that Israel chases will slip away. Every source of provision that Israel trusted instead of God will dry up. Not because God wants Israel to suffer — but because God wants Israel to come home. And sometimes the only way a wandering heart finds its way back is when every other road leads to a dead end.

And what does Israel discover when the roads all close?

"For then it was better for me than now."

There it is. The moment of clarity. The moment when a prodigal, sitting in the far country with empty hands and an empty stomach, finally remembers what home was like. That is the moment God has been working toward all along.

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## WHAT GOD PROMISED TO DO

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When Israel turns back, what will she find? Not a God who has moved on. Not a husband who has closed the door. Listen to what God promises — and notice that He says it three times:

*"I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD." (Hosea 2:19–20)*

Three times: I will betroth you to Me.

The word "betroth" is a covenant word. It means to bind yourself to another in a permanent, legal, public commitment. God is not offering Israel a casual reunion. He is offering a new betrothal — a new covenant — one that is built on righteousness, on justice, on loving-kindness, on mercy, and on faithfulness.

And then this: "you shall know the LORD."

Throughout the book of Hosea, the word "know" carries deep meaning. It is not the knowledge of facts about God. It is the intimate, personal, covenant knowledge of a wife who knows her husband — not just his name, but his heart. That is what God is offering Israel. Not religion. Not ritual. A relationship so close and so deep that knowledge is the only word for it.

*"Has this happened yet? What period in time is this referring to?"*

These are the questions we must sit with. The full restoration described in Hosea 2 still lies ahead. But the promise is real. The betrothal will happen. The knowing will come.

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## **HOSEA GOES AFTER GOMER — CHAPTER THREE**

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By chapter three, Gomer has left. She has gone back to her old life, to other men, to the world she came from. And God speaks to Hosea again:

*"Then the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the*

*love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."*  
(Hosea 3:1)

Go again. Love her again.

Not because she has come back. Not because she has cleaned herself up or made herself worthy. Go again — while she is still in her sin, still with another man, still choosing the world over her husband.

This is one of the most powerful pictures of God's love in all of Scripture. He does not wait for Israel to become worthy before He loves them. He loves them in their wandering. He pursues them in their unfaithfulness. He pays the price to bring them home even when they have not yet asked to come.

*"So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley." (Hosea 3:2)*

Hosea paid a price. He went to wherever Gomer was — perhaps she had sold herself into some form of bondage — and he bought her back. He redeemed her. Out of his own resources, he paid what was required.

I want you to see the picture here. This is not coincidence. This is God showing us, through a real marriage, something He would one day do in the most ultimate way possible — redeem His people at a price only He could pay.

Hosea brought Gomer home and gave her these instructions:

*"You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man — so, too, will I be toward you." (Hosea 3:3)*

Stay. Be faithful. And I will be faithful to you.

And then comes the verse that opens a window into history:

*"For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim." (Hosea 3:4)*

What period in time is verse four referring to?

Think about this carefully. For nearly two thousand years, the Jewish people have lived exactly as this verse describes. No king. No prince. For much of that time, no Temple and no sacrifice. No ephod — the priestly garment. No teraphim. Scattered among the nations, without the institutions of their covenant life.

Has this not been the story of Israel from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD until the modern era?

But the verse does not stop with the darkness:

*"Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3:5)*

Afterward. That word carries the weight of God's faithfulness stretched across centuries. There is a day coming — it is coming — when Israel will return and seek the LORD their God. When they will fear Him and find His goodness. In the latter days.

Every word of what Hosea lived with Gomer points to that day.

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## **WHAT WE HAVE SEEN IN CHAPTERS ONE THROUGH THREE**

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Before we move forward, let us take stock of what these three chapters have taught us.

We have seen that God chose a man named Hosea — whose very name means salvation — to carry a message that could not be preached with words alone. It had to be lived.

We have seen that every child born in that household carried a public prophecy in their name: judgment coming, mercy suspended, the covenant under severe strain.

We have seen that God, even in His judgment, could not close the door on restoration. Grace kept breaking through.

We have seen that Israel's unfaithfulness was not dramatic rebellion but slow, practical forgetting — looking to the world for what only God provides.

We have seen that God's response to the wandering was not abandonment but pursuit — walls of thorns, closed roads, a husband who will not stop calling his wife home.

We have seen the promise of a new betrothal — forever, in righteousness, in mercy, in faithfulness — "and you shall know the LORD."

And we have seen Hosea go after Gomer a second time and buy her back at a price — a picture that every reader of this book should hold carefully, because it points to something much larger than one man's marriage.

The God we are meeting in these pages is not a distant Judge waiting to render a verdict. He is a pursuing Husband who has loved His people from before they were a people, who has stayed faithful when they were faithless, and who will not rest until the ones He loves are home.

That is the God of Hosea.

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SECTION TWO: THE INDICTMENT — GOD BRINGS HIS CASE AGAINST ISRAEL

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In the first three chapters of Hosea, we watched a marriage. We saw Gomer wander and Hosea pursue. We heard God's voice full of grief and longing — the voice of a husband who has not stopped loving his wayward wife.

Now, in chapters four and five, the tone shifts.

God has been patient. He has been pursuing. He has been sending message after message through the names of children, through the imagery of a broken marriage, through prophet after prophet across the years. And now He speaks in a different register. He speaks as a judge.

He is bringing a formal charge. He is calling Israel into court.

Let us listen to what He says — because every word of it matters.

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THE CHARGE IS READ — HOSEA CHAPTER FOUR

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*"Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for  
the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the*

*land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.'" (Hosea 4:1)*

Three things are missing. Truth. Mercy. The knowledge of God.

I want us to look at each one carefully, because these three absences are not random. They are connected. They flow from one another. And together they describe a society that has lost its moorings.

Truth first. When a people lose their commitment to truth — when lying becomes ordinary, when promises are made to be broken, when words no longer mean what they say — everything built on those words begins to collapse. Contracts. Marriages. Governments. Communities. All of it depends on truth. Remove truth and you remove the foundation.

Mercy next. Where truth is gone, mercy follows. Because mercy requires that we see the person in front of us accurately — that we tell the truth about their condition, and then choose to respond with compassion rather than calculation. When truth is corrupted, mercy becomes selective. We are merciful when it benefits us and indifferent when it costs us something.

And then — the knowledge of God.

Of the three, this is the root. Because if a people truly know God — if they know His character, His ways, His heart — truth and mercy will flow naturally from that knowledge. You cannot truly know the God of Israel and become a liar. You cannot truly know the God who is love and withhold mercy from the vulnerable. The loss of the knowledge of God is what makes everything else possible.

Now look at what follows immediately from that loss:

*"By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed." (Hosea 4:2)*

This is not a description of a few bad actors. This is a description of a culture. Swearing. Lying. Killing. Stealing. Adultery. And the phrase "they break all restraint" — the Hebrew picture here is of a dam that has burst. When God is removed from the center of a society, there is nothing left to hold back the flood of human selfishness. The water finds every crack and the walls come down.

We need to ask ourselves honestly: does any of this sound familiar?

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## THE FAILURE OF THE PRIESTS

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God's indictment does not stop with the general population. He turns His attention specifically to the leaders — and particularly to the priests. Because the priests were the ones responsible for teaching the Law. They were the shepherds. And the flock had gone astray on their watch.

*"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:6)*

This may be the most quoted verse in the entire book of Hosea. And it is quoted often because it is devastatingly relevant to every generation.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Notice that God does not say: My people perished because of a military defeat. Or: because of a bad harvest. Or: because of political corruption. He says they are destroyed for lack of knowledge — specifically, the knowledge of God's law. And then He lays the responsibility for that lack directly at the feet of the priests who were supposed to preserve and teach it.

You rejected knowledge. You forgot the law of your God.

This is a sobering word. The priests were not called to be administrators or ceremonial functionaries. They were called to be teachers. To stand between God and the people as living bridges — carrying the word of God to the congregation and carrying the prayers of the congregation back to God. When they stopped doing that — when God's word became a burden they set aside rather than a treasure they protected — the people were left without a guide. And a people without guidance in the things of God will always drift toward destruction.

I want to stop here and ask you something directly.

Who is responsible for the knowledge of God in your life? Who has been given the task of teaching you? And have you received that teaching — really received it — or have you let it pass through your ears without taking root in your heart?

Because the indictment God brings against the priests of Hosea's day is also a word to every teacher and every student of God's word in every generation. We are all responsible for what we do with the knowledge we have been given.

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THE MORE THEY INCREASED, THE MORE THEY SINNED

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God continues His indictment with an observation that is both sorrowful and precise:

*"The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame." (Hosea 4:7)*

Prosperity had not produced gratitude. It had produced pride. The more Israel had — more land, more livestock, more wealth, more influence — the more they had to offer on foreign altars. Success had become the enemy of faithfulness.

Think about that. We tend to assume that if God blesses us with abundance, that abundance will draw us closer to Him. Hosea chapters four and five suggest something more dangerous: that abundance, without the knowledge of God at its center, tends to make us feel like we did this ourselves. And people who feel like they did it themselves tend to shift their worship toward the thing they made it with — their own cleverness, their own strength, their own connections.

The priests compounded this problem by feeding off of it:

*"They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on their iniquity." (Hosea 4:8)*

The religious leaders had become financially dependent on the people's sin. When the people sinned and brought offerings to cover it, the priests got a portion. A system that should have called sin into the light and brought people to repentance had become a system that tacitly encouraged sin — because sin kept the revenue flowing.

There is a word for this: corruption. And when corruption reaches the priesthood — when the very people tasked with calling the nation back to God are profiting from the nation's rebellion — then the last line of defense is gone.

*"And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds."  
(Hosea 4:9)*

Like people, like priest. The leaders had become mirrors of the people's sin rather than models of God's holiness. And so God declares: the judgment

that is coming is for everyone equally. The robe and the collar will not provide cover. Those who had the most responsibility will bear the heaviest accounting.

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## THE SPIRIT OF HARLOTRY

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As chapter four continues, God names something that runs through the entire indictment like a thread:

*"Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart." (Hosea 4:11)*

*"For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God." (Hosea 4:12)*

The phrase "spirit of harlotry" is significant. Hosea is not describing individual acts of immorality — he is describing a pervasive spiritual condition. A spirit — an orientation of the heart — that pulls a person away from God and toward whatever is more immediately satisfying.

We need to understand this carefully. Physical harlotry was certainly present in Israel. The fertility cult worship of the Baals involved actual sexual immorality as part of its religious practice. When Israel went to the high places and burned incense under the oak trees, they were not just lighting candles — they were participating in rituals that God had explicitly forbidden, rituals that mixed the worship of Yahweh with the practices of the surrounding nations.

But the spirit of harlotry is broader than physical immorality. It is the spirit of unfaithfulness. The spirit that says: I want what I want, right now, from whatever source will give it to me, and I will worry about the covenant

later.

That spirit is not unique to ancient Israel.

*"My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray." (Hosea 4:12)*

They were consulting idols for guidance. Pieces of carved wood were making their decisions. And what God is describing here is not stupidity — it is desperation. When people have lost the knowledge of God, when they no longer know how to hear His voice or trust His word, they will turn to anything that seems to offer direction. Horoscopes. Superstitions. Popular opinion. The carved wooden staff.

The human heart was made to seek guidance. It will seek it somewhere. The question is only: where?

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ISRAEL IS STUBBORN — BUT JUDAH, TAKE HEED

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God makes a distinction in the middle of His indictment — one worth noting:

*"Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, nor go up to Beth Aven, nor swear an oath, saying, 'As the LORD lives.'" (Hosea 4:15)*

God is warning the southern kingdom — Judah — not to follow the example of Israel. He is, in effect, saying: watch what is happening to your brothers in the north. Do not tell yourself it cannot happen to you. Do not go to Gilgal or Beth Aven — places of corrupted worship — and

participate in their sin.

This is a word of grace wrapped inside a warning. God was not yet finished with Judah. The southern kingdom still had the Temple. It still had the Davidic line. It still had prophets who were calling the people back. And God was pleading with them — even now, while Israel was falling — to learn from what they were watching rather than repeat it.

*"For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf; now the LORD will let them forage like a lamb in open country."  
(Hosea 4:16)*

A stubborn calf resists the yoke. It will not be directed. It will not be led. And so God says: if they will not be directed, they will be left to wander on their own — alone and unprotected, like a lamb in open country with no shepherd.

That image should make every reader pause. The open country is not safety. It is exposure. A lamb in open country is prey. God is not abandoning Israel with indifference — He is describing with grief what becomes of a people who insist on living outside His guidance and protection.

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CHAPTER FIVE: WHEN GOD WITHDRAWS

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Chapter five deepens the indictment. God turns now to address three groups simultaneously:

*"Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor." (Hosea 5:1)*

Priests. People. Kings. No one is exempt. And the charge against the leaders is especially pointed — they have been a snare, a trap, a net. Instead of leading the people toward God, the leaders had been catching them in religious corruption and holding them there.

*"I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; for now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled. They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the LORD." (Hosea 5:3–4)*

There is that phrase again: they do not know the LORD.

Everything comes back to this. Every failure, every corruption, every act of unfaithfulness — at the root of it is the loss of the knowledge of God. When you do not know the LORD — not just know about Him, but truly know Him — then everything else drifts. Your deeds drift. Your worship drifts. Your leadership drifts. Your family drifts. Your nation drifts.

The knowledge of God is not a luxury for the spiritually advanced. It is the foundation that holds everything else in place.

God then describes the futility of religious activity without relationship:

*"With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them." (Hosea 5:6)*

He has withdrawn Himself.

Four words that should shake us. The people still had their flocks and herds. They were still going through the motions of seeking the LORD — still bringing their sacrifices, still performing the rituals, still going to the right places. But God was no longer there to be found. He had withdrawn.

Is it possible to seek God and not find Him? This verse says yes. It is possible to go through every religious motion while missing the very God those motions were meant to honor. It is possible to have a form of worship without the substance of relationship.

We need to ask honestly: Can God's presence be assumed? Or is His presence something we must actually pursue?

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THE LION AND THE WOUND

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Chapter five closes with some of the most vivid imagery in the book:

*"For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue."  
(Hosea 5:14)*

God as a lion. This image is not comfortable, but it is honest. When a people persist in rebellion after mercy has been extended again and again, when they have refused every gentle invitation to return, sometimes the only thing that will wake them up is the shock of loss. God declares that He Himself will be the one who brings the tearing — not an enemy nation acting on its own, but the very hand of God working through circumstances to break down what Israel has built in place of Him.

And then — even here, even in the most severe language of the entire passage — hope appears:

*"I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." (Hosea 5:15)*

I want you to see what this verse is saying. God withdraws — but His withdrawal has a purpose. He withdraws until they acknowledge their offense. He withdraws so that they will seek His face. He withdraws because He knows that affliction, when it finally comes, will do what comfort could not — it will drive them back to Him.

And here is something remarkable in that last phrase: "In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

There is a word there — earnestly — that carries urgency and sincerity. Not the casual, half-hearted seeking of people who are comfortable. The desperate, wholehearted seeking of people who have nowhere else to turn. God knows how to create the conditions for that kind of seeking. And He is not ashamed to use them.

Notice also: "I will return again to My place." In order to return to His place, God must have come from His place. This is a quiet but powerful statement about the nature of God's engagement with human history. He came. He was present with His people. He dwells not in some unreachable heaven, indifferent to what happens below — He came near. He spoke. He was known. And He will come again.

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## **WHAT THE INDICTMENT TEACHES US**

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Before we move into chapter six, let us gather what these two chapters have taught us.

God brought a formal charge against Israel in Hosea 4 and 5. The charge was not complicated. It came down to three missing things: truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God. From those three absences, everything else followed — the lying and killing and stealing, the corruption of the

priesthood, the consulting of idols, the spirit of harlotry that infected the entire culture from top to bottom.

The priests who were supposed to guard the knowledge of God had rejected it. The people who were supposed to receive it had done the same. And so a generation grew up destroyed for lack of knowledge — not because no one had been given the responsibility of teaching, but because those teachers had abandoned their post.

God's response moved in stages. He warned through the prophet. He hedged up the path with thorns. He warned Judah not to follow Israel's example. He described the futility of religious ritual without true relationship. And finally He declared that He would withdraw — not forever, but until the affliction He allowed brought His people to their knees.

The indictment of Hosea 4 and 5 is one of the most searching passages in the Hebrew Bible. It strips away every excuse and every religious performance and asks the one question that cannot be evaded:

Do you know the LORD?

Not: Do you know about Him? Not: Do you attend the right ceremonies?  
Not: Do you use the right vocabulary?

Do you know Him?

That question is the hinge on which all of Hosea turns. It is the question that drives the wayward wife back to her first husband. It is the question that will open chapter six with one of the most remarkable prophetic declarations in all of Scripture.

But that is for our next section.

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SECTION THREE: THE TENDER GOD — HOSEA 6 AND 7

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We have sat through two chapters of formal indictment. God has laid out His case against Israel with precision and clarity. Truth is gone. Mercy has evaporated. The knowledge of God has been rejected. The priests have failed. The people have followed the priests into ruin. God has declared that He will withdraw — like a lion who tears and goes away — until affliction drives His people back to seek His face.

And now, at the opening of chapter six, something remarkable happens.

Israel speaks.

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THE RETURN BEGINS — HOSEA 6:1–2

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*"Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight." (Hosea 6:1–2)*

These two verses carry more weight than their brevity suggests. Let us take them apart carefully, because every phrase is doing important work.

First, notice the word "return."

I want you to hold that word for a moment. You cannot return to a place you never left. You cannot go back to something you were never a part of. The very call to return is itself a confession. It is Israel acknowledging — even if quietly, even if not yet with full understanding — that they have been somewhere they should not have been. That they have wandered. That the distance between them and God is real.

We studied in our first session how Moses himself warned the people, before his death, that they would turn from the God of Israel and serve the gods of the nations where they went to live. That turning happened. It happened slowly and then all at once. And now, in chapter six, we see the first stirring of something in the other direction.

Come. Let us return.

Second, notice the confidence behind the return:

"For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up."

Israel does not return to a God they are uncertain about. They return knowing something about His character. They know He is the one who struck — but they also know He is the one who heals. They know He allowed the tearing — but they also know that the hands that tore are the same hands that bind up wounds.

This is not a people approaching God with a lawyer's argument. This is a people who have been in enough pain long enough that they have finally remembered what they knew all along: going back to God is always possible, and going back to God always leads to healing.

Third — and this is where the passage becomes extraordinary:

"After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight."

What are these two days? And what is the third day?

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## **TWO THOUSAND YEARS — THE PROPHETIC CLOCK OF HOSEA 6**

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To answer those questions, we need to go to a passage from the Apostle Peter:

*"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8–9)*

Peter wrote these words to a generation of believers who were shaken. Jerusalem had been destroyed. The Temple was gone. The world they had known had collapsed around them, and many had begun to think — surely we are in the final days. Surely the end is upon us.

Peter corrected them. Gently but firmly, he reminded them that God does not measure time the way we do. A thousand years is as a single day in His sight. He is not slow to fulfill His promises — He is patient. He is giving every person time to come to repentance, because He is not willing that any should perish.

Now hold that alongside what Hosea said.

Two days — and after two days He will revive us. If one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, then two days is two thousand years. From the time Israel rejected their Lord to the present day, very close to two thousand years have passed. Two thousand years of wandering. Two thousand years of being scattered among the nations. Two thousand years without king or prince or sacrifice — exactly as Hosea 3:4 said they would be.

Two days.

And the third day?

"On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight."

The third day — the third thousand years — is the millennium. It is the age in which Israel will at last live in His sight. The age when the wandering ends, when the betrothal promise of Hosea 2 is fulfilled, when the people who were once called Lo-Ammi — Not My People — will be called sons of the living God.

Very prophetic and powerful two verses.

I want you to sit with that for a moment. In two simple lines — lines that could be read and passed over in seconds — Hosea mapped out two thousand years of Jewish history and pointed to what lies beyond them. This is not coincidence. This is the Word of God doing exactly what it has always done: speaking truth across centuries to people who have the ears to hear it.

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## **THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE — HOSEA 6:3**

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After the great prophetic declaration of verses one and two, the passage continues with an invitation:

*"Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.  
His going forth is established as the morning; He will  
come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to  
the earth." (Hosea 6:3)*

Let us know. Let us pursue.

There is movement in that language. The knowledge of God is not something that falls into our laps while we are sitting still. It is something we pursue — actively, intentionally, with the same energy that Israel had been pouring into the pursuit of her lovers and her idols.

And what does the pursuit of God's knowledge produce? The verse gives us two pictures.

The morning. "His going forth is established as the morning." The dawn is certain. You do not wonder whether the sun will rise. You do not set an alarm out of uncertainty — you set it because you know the morning is coming. In the same way, God's faithfulness is established. It does not waver. It does not fail to appear. Every morning is a testimony to the certainty of His character.

The rain. "He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth." In the land of Israel, rain was not a minor convenience — it was life itself. The former rain came in October and November, softening the hard summer ground for planting. The latter rain came in March and April, swelling the grain before harvest. Without both rains, the crop failed. Without both rains, the people went hungry.

God promises that He will come to His people like both rains. Not just once — not a single visitation followed by an eternal dry season — but in every season, in every need, in every moment when the ground of the human heart needs softening or when the grain of growing faith needs swelling before the harvest.

He will come like the rain. That is His promise.

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THE ONE THING GOD DESIRES — HOSEA 6:6

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Before the indictment of chapters four and five gave way to the tender invitation of chapter six, something was building. And now, in verse six, it comes to its clearest expression:

*"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)*

This verse is one of the most important in the entire Old Testament. It was so important that Jesus quoted it — twice, in the Gospel of Matthew — when the Pharisees challenged His choices about how He spent His time. "Go and learn what this means," He told them. As if to say: you have the sacrifices, but you have missed the point of all of them.

Let us understand what God is and is not saying here.

He is not saying that sacrifice and burnt offerings are wrong. He established the system of sacrifice Himself. He gave Moses the detailed instructions for the tabernacle and the altar and the priestly service. When He says "not sacrifice" — He does not mean "eliminate sacrifice." He means: when sacrifice is offered without mercy, it is empty. When religious ritual exists without the heart orientation it was designed to express, it has become a performance rather than a prayer.

He desires mercy.

In the Hebrew, the word translated "mercy" here is *hesed* — one of the great words of the Old Testament. It carries layers of meaning: lovingkindness, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness, loyal affection that

does not quit when it is inconvenient. This is the word used again and again to describe God's own character toward His people. He is a God of hesed. And He desires that same quality in the people who bear His name.

And He desires the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

More than. That phrase is important. He is establishing a priority. The knowledge of God comes first. The burnt offerings were meant to flow from and express that knowledge. When they are disconnected from it — when people offer their bulls and their rams without any real understanding of who they are offering them to or why — the smoke goes up but nothing goes with it.

I encourage you to consider what this means for us today.

We can attend every service. We can sing every song. We can put money in every offering. We can serve on every committee and volunteer for every program. And if the knowledge of God — the deep, personal, covenant knowledge of who He is and how He loves — is absent from all of it, then we have sacrificed without mercy. We have offered without knowing.

God wants us. Not just our religious performances. He wants us.

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THE FAITHFULNESS THAT FADES — HOSEA 6:4–7

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But then — immediately after this great declaration of what God desires — He speaks with a kind of heartbroken exasperation:

*"O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud,*

*and like the early dew it goes away." (Hosea 6:4)*

O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?

There is something almost tender in that question. God is not raging — He is bewildered. He has called. He has pursued. He has sent prophets. He has allowed the tearing. He has offered the healing. And the response of His people is like a morning cloud — visible for a moment, then gone before noon.

Have you ever seen the early dew on the grass? In the cool of the morning, the blades are covered with it — a thousand tiny drops of moisture, every one of them catching the light. And then the sun rises. And by mid-morning, every drop has vanished. The grass is dry. The dew that seemed so abundant is simply gone.

That is Israel's faithfulness.

It rises up under pressure. It appears when things are going badly, when the affliction is acute and the need is real. "Come, let us return to the LORD," they say. And they mean it — in the moment they mean it. But when the pressure eases, when the comfort returns, when the morning cloud of spiritual urgency encounters the rising sun of ordinary life, it evaporates.

Is this unique to ancient Israel?

Think honestly about your own life. About times when a crisis drove you to your knees — when the diagnosis came back wrong, or the relationship fell apart, or the finances collapsed — and in that moment, prayer was everything, and God felt very near. And then consider what happened when things improved. Did the intimacy last? Did the urgency of seeking God stay with you? Or did something like a morning cloud appear and then quietly disappear?

God asked Israel: What shall I do with you? He had tried the gentle path. Now He names what He had to do instead:

*"Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and your judgments are like light that goes forth." (Hosea 6:5)*

He sent prophets who spoke hard words. Not because He wanted to wound, but because the morning cloud of their faithfulness could only be addressed with the kind of bold, clear, uncompromising truth that cuts through spiritual fog. The prophets were not popular. They were never popular. But they were necessary.

And then this telling verse:

*"But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me." (Hosea 6:7)*

Like men. Simply like ordinary human beings, doing what human beings do when left to themselves — they broke the covenant. They dealt treacherously. Not dramatically, not openly, not all at once — but steadily, quietly, in the accumulated small decisions of ordinary life that collectively amounted to walking away from God.

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THE HEAT OF THE OVEN — HOSEA CHAPTER SEVEN

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Chapter seven opens with God describing what He found when He came to heal Israel:

*"When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria.*

*For they have committed fraud; a thief comes in; a band of robbers takes spoil outside." (Hosea 7:1)*

God came to heal. He found uncovered iniquity. He found fraud and robbery — a society where trust had collapsed so completely that theft had become simply the way things worked. The thief at home and the band of robbers in the street were two expressions of the same spirit: take what you can, when you can, from whoever you can.

*"They do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness; now their own deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face." (Hosea 7:2)*

They had forgotten that God sees. Not just the public acts — the ones done in daylight, the ones they were willing to own — but all of it. Everything done in secret, every quiet compromise, every private calculation that said: I can get away with this. They had forgotten that nothing is done out of God's sight. Their own deeds had surrounded them like a wall, and those deeds were standing before the face of God even when Israel was not looking in His direction.

God then uses one of the most vivid images in all of Hosea:

*"They are all adulterers. Like an oven heated by a baker — He ceases stirring the fire after kneading the dough, until it is leavened." (Hosea 7:4)*

Picture a baker in the ancient world. He lights his oven in the evening, kneads the dough, and then steps away. Through the night, while the baker sleeps, the oven keeps burning on its own. The heat sustains itself. By morning, the oven is blazing. No one has tended it. No one has fed it. It burns because that is what it does.

That is what has happened to Israel's passion for sin. It no longer needs to be stoked. It burns on its own, through the night, hotter by morning than it

was the evening before. The appetite for what is wrong had become self-sustaining. And the evidence was visible at the highest level:

*"They are all hot, like an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings have fallen. None among them calls upon Me." (Hosea 7:7)*

All their kings have fallen. In the final decades of the northern kingdom, Israel burned through king after king — some killed by assassins, some overthrown by rivals, some simply collapsing under the weight of their own corruption. Political instability was the outward sign of an inward spiritual catastrophe.

And the most heartbreaking line: "None among them calls upon Me."

Not the kings. Not the priests. Not the people. In the middle of crisis after crisis, with their society coming apart and their security evaporating, not one among them turned to God and said: Lord, what are we doing wrong? Lord, what do You require? Lord, help us.

They turned to Egypt. They turned to Assyria. They turned to political alliances and military strategies and diplomatic negotiations. They called on every nation that might help them — except the One who actually could.

*"Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense — they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." (Hosea 7:11)*

A silly dove flies in circles. It looks busy, it seems purposeful, but it is going nowhere. Egypt was not going to save Israel. Assyria was not going to rescue Israel. Every nation Israel turned to for help would eventually become their oppressor. But in their panic — without the wisdom that comes from knowing God — they could not see it.

*"Woe to them, for they have fled from Me! Destruction to them, because they have transgressed against Me! Though*

*I redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against Me."  
(Hosea 7:13)*

Though I redeemed them. God had brought them out of Egypt. He had provided for them in the desert. He had given them the land. He had raised up judges and kings and prophets to lead them. He had redeemed them at every turn. And their response was to flee. To run in the opposite direction. To speak lies about who He was and what He had done.

He had disciplined them — and they devised evil against Him in response. He had strengthened their arms — and they used those arms to reach toward every other god they could find. He had called them to the Most High — and they returned to whatever was lowest and most convenient.

*"They return, but not to the Most High; they are like a  
treacherous bow." (Hosea 7:16)*

A treacherous bow. A bow that a soldier draws back with confidence, aims carefully — and then at the moment of release sends the arrow somewhere no one intended. The bow looked reliable. It performed every preliminary step correctly. But when it mattered most, it failed. It sent its shot in the wrong direction.

That is Israel in chapter seven. Going through the motions of return, appearing to reorient — and then, at the critical moment, missing the target entirely. Not returning to the Most High. Not finding God in their crisis. Sending the arrow of their devotion somewhere else.

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## **THE TENDERNESS BENEATH THE JUDGMENT**

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I want to stop before we move into chapter eight and draw your attention to something that runs through all of chapters six and seven — something

that is easy to miss when we are focused on the severity of the words.

Look again at Hosea 6:4: "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?"

That is not the voice of a judge cold with anger. That is the voice of a father who does not know what else to try. It is the voice of a husband who has exhausted every gentle option. It is the voice of a God who — in spite of everything, in spite of the morning cloud faithfulness and the oven-hot passion for sin and the silly dove politics — still loves the people He is judging.

The tenderness of God is not absent from these chapters. It is present in every question, every image, every description of what He tried before the judgment came. He healed. He disciplined. He sent prophets. He strengthened their arms. He redeemed them again and again.

And here is what we need to carry with us into the rest of this study:

God did not withdraw from Israel because He stopped loving them. He withdrew because love sometimes requires it. He allowed the tearing because He knew the wound would drive them back. He sent the prophets with hard words because the morning cloud of their faithfulness could not survive the warmth of comfort — it needed the cold air of truth to survive.

Hosea 5:15 said: "I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face."

He is waiting. Not with indifference — with longing. The tender God of chapter six — the God who promises to come like the rain, who desires mercy and the knowledge of Himself — is the same God who is described in the judgment chapters. He does not change. He is always pursuing His people. The question is always whether His people will be found.

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## **WHAT SECTION THREE HAS SHOWN US**

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In these two chapters, we have seen the fullest picture yet of what God desires from His people — and why the gap between what He desires and what He receives breaks His heart.

He desires return — a genuine turning back from the false paths to the first husband who has been waiting all along.

He desires the knowledge of Himself — not as an academic subject but as a living relationship, as intimate and real as a marriage.

He desires mercy — hesed, that covenant lovingkindness that does not quit, poured out toward God and toward one another.

He desires faithfulness that outlasts the morning — not the morning cloud that burns off when life gets comfortable, but the steady, daily returning to His face that sustains a life of genuine faith.

What He found instead was an oven of self-sustaining sin, a silly dove flying in panicked circles toward every nation except the right one, kings falling on one another, priests who had become part of the problem, and a people who turned to the Most High in moments of crisis and immediately forgot Him when the crisis passed.

But here is the great word that runs through it all:

He is still calling. In the middle of the indictment, in the middle of the judgment language, in the middle of oven images and treacherous bows and silly doves — His voice is still there. Come. Return. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.

He will come like the rain. He promised.

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# **SECTION FOUR: THE RETURN AND THE PROMISE — HOSEA 8 THROUGH 14**

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We have walked a long road through the book of Hosea. We have seen the marriage — the unfaithful wife, the pursuing husband, the children named for judgment. We have heard the formal indictment — truth gone, mercy gone, the knowledge of God abandoned. We have felt the tenderness of God beneath the severity of His words — the God who comes like rain, who desires mercy more than sacrifice, who asks His people "what shall I do with you?" with the voice of a father who has not stopped loving.

Now we come to the final movement of the book.

Chapters eight through ten build toward a climax of judgment. And then — in chapters thirteen and fourteen — something breaks open. The darkness gives way. The long night of exile points toward dawn. And the book ends not with a verdict but with a promise.

Let us read it together.

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## **THE TRUMPET SOUNDS — HOSEA CHAPTER EIGHT**

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*"Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law."
(Hosea 8:1)*

The trumpet in ancient Israel was not a musical instrument — it was an alarm. It was the sound of warning, the signal that danger was approaching, the call that told the watchman on the wall to alert the city. When Hosea says "set the trumpet to your mouth," he is saying: sound the alarm. The thing you have been warned about is coming.

And what is coming? An eagle. The imagery of a great bird of prey descending from the sky — swift, silent until the moment of impact, devastating in its arrival. This is the picture of the Assyrian army that would soon descend on the northern kingdom and carry its people into exile never to return as a distinct national entity.

But notice why the eagle comes: "because they have transgressed My covenant and rebelled against My law."

Not because Assyria was more powerful. Not because Israel's military strategy was flawed. Not because of political miscalculation. The eagle comes because of covenant violation. Israel had agreed, at Sinai, to a binding relationship with God — and had broken that agreement at every level. The external military threat was not the cause of the coming destruction. It was the instrument of a consequence that Israel had been building for generations.

"Israel will cry to Me, 'My God, we know You!' Israel has rejected the good; the enemy will pursue him." (Hosea 8:2–3)

This is one of the most unsettling verses in the entire book. They will cry out — "My God, we know You!" — in the moment of crisis. But God's answer is silence. Not because He is unmoved. But because the cry that

comes only in crisis, from a people who have spent decades rejecting the good, is not yet the deep return He has been waiting for. It is not yet the acknowledgment of offense He described in Hosea 5:15.

They knew how to use the language of relationship. They did not yet know how to live in it.

"They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them." (Hosea 8:4)

Israel had been running its own political life independent of God for a long time. Kings were chosen by human ambition, by military force, by popular appeal — not by divine appointment. Leaders were installed and removed without any reference to what God desired. And so God says: I did not acknowledge them. The kings that Israel crowned were not the kings God recognized.

This matters for us. When we make significant decisions — in our families, in our communities, in our work — without any reference to what God desires, we are doing the same thing Israel did. We are setting up kings that God has not appointed. And the result is always the same: a leadership structure built on human preference that cannot bear the weight of real life when the crisis comes.

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## **WHAT THEY SOWED — HOSEA 8:7**

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Chapter eight contains one of the most memorable images in all of Scripture:

"They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud; it shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up." (Hosea 8:7)

They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Every farmer understands the law of the harvest: you reap what you sow, and you reap more of it than you sowed. Plant a single kernel of corn and you do not harvest a kernel — you harvest an ear, a stalk, a hundred kernels where one went into the ground. The harvest always exceeds the planting.

Israel had been planting wind. Empty, weightless, nothing-wind. They planted idols and political alliances and religious performance without relationship and the spirit of harlotry that chased every false lover. All of it was wind — it had no substance, no root, no capacity to produce anything nourishing.

And the harvest of wind is not just more wind. The harvest of wind is a whirlwind.

A whirlwind does not nourish. It destroys. It tears up what has been planted. It levels what has been built. It carries away everything that is not anchored to something deeper than the surface of the ground.

This is the law that Israel had violated — not a human law, not a political law, but a spiritual law built into the fabric of creation. What you invest your heart in is what will come back to you, multiplied. Invest in the things of God — His word, His ways, His knowledge, His mercy — and what grows will sustain life. Invest in the wind — in what is empty and temporary and disconnected from God — and the whirlwind is what you will harvest.

"For Israel has forgotten his Maker, and has built temples; Judah also has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his palaces." (Hosea 8:14)

They forgot their Maker. Not their God in a theological sense — their Maker. The one who shaped them, who breathed life into them as a nation, who created them out of nothing at the Red Sea and formed them at Sinai. To forget your Maker is to lose the most basic orientation a creature can have — the knowledge of where you came from and who you belong to.

When that knowledge is lost, people build temples to themselves. They build fortified cities — walls to protect what they have accumulated, defenses to preserve the life they have constructed without God. And those walls will not hold. The fire will come.

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THE FIG TREE — HOSEA 9:10

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Chapter nine contains a verse that is, in Pastor Robert's own words, his favorite scripture from this entire study:

"I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved." (Hosea 9:10)

This is the scripture that teaches us Israel is the fig tree.

I want you to notice something carefully. God describes finding Israel "like grapes in the wilderness." Think about that image — stumbling upon a cluster of grapes in a dry, barren place. An unexpected delight. A gift in an unlikely setting. That is how God describes His first encounter with Israel as a people — like discovering something beautiful and nourishing in a place where you would not expect to find it.

Then He shifts to the fig tree image: "I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season."

Now stop here. If this were an ordinary fig tree, the firstfruits would be figs. That is what fig trees produce. But God says He saw the fathers — the people, the patriarchs, the early generations of Israel — as the firstfruits on this fig tree. People are the fruit of this tree. Israel herself is the fig tree.

This is not a casual metaphor. The fig tree appears throughout Scripture as a symbol of Israel's national life — her prosperity, her spiritual condition, her relationship with God. When Jesus stood before a fig tree that had leaves but no fruit, He was speaking in the language of Hosea. When the disciples asked about the signs of the end and Jesus pointed to the fig tree putting forth its leaves, He was using imagery that anyone familiar with the Hebrew prophets would have recognized.

The fig tree is Israel.

And in Hosea 9, the fig tree went to Baal Peor — one of the most shameful episodes in Israel's early history, when the men of Israel committed sexual immorality with Moabite women and worshiped the Baal of Peor, resulting in a devastating plague. They were separated to that shame, God says. They became an abomination — and not just any abomination. They became like the thing they loved. They took on the character of the idol they worshiped.

That is one of the most sobering spiritual laws in Scripture. We become like what we worship. If we worship the God of mercy and truth and covenant faithfulness, those qualities begin to grow in us over time. If we worship what is false — whether the Baals of ancient Canaan or the more modern idols of comfort and success and self-determination — we take on the character of those things. Cold. Empty. Unable to sustain life.

What do you want to look like in ten years? Look at what you are worshiping today.

*"My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations."
(Hosea 9:17)*

As it has been for two thousand years.

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THE FALLOW GROUND — HOSEA 10:12

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Chapter ten brings us to one of the great invitations of the entire book. After pages of indictment, after image after image of what Israel has done wrong and what the consequences will be, God pauses and speaks with the voice of a farmer calling a field to life:

"Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD, till He comes and rains righteousness on you." (Hosea 10:12)

Fallow ground is ground that has been left unplanted. It was productive once — or could be. But nothing has been sown in it. Nothing has been tended. The soil has hardened. The weeds have grown in. What was meant to be fertile has become closed and resistant.

God is calling Israel to break that ground up.

Not to wait for better conditions. Not to make excuses about the hardness of the soil. Break it up now. Pick up the implement of repentance and righteousness and drive it into the hard ground of a heart that has been closed to God, and turn it over. Let the air and light in. Make it ready for seed.

And then — notice the sequence. Sow righteousness. Reap mercy. Break up the fallow ground. And then: seek the LORD. Not as a first step, but as the ongoing activity of a life that has turned toward Him. Seek Him. Keep seeking. Do not stop seeking.

Till He comes.

He is coming. That phrase is embedded right in the middle of the verse, almost quietly. We might miss it if we are reading too fast. But it is there, and it is important. The farmer who breaks up fallow ground does not do it in a vacuum — he does it because he expects rain. He does it because rain is coming. The broken ground is preparation for an arrival.

God is promising an arrival.

"He comes and rains righteousness on you."

The same God who promised in Hosea 6:3 to come like the former and latter rain — He is coming. And when He comes, what He will pour out is not condemnation but righteousness. Not punishment but the very thing He has been calling Israel to plant.

It is time to seek the LORD. Not later. Not when circumstances are more comfortable or the ground feels less hard. Now. It is time now.

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## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE RANSOM FROM DEATH**

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Pastor Robert's lessons make a deliberate choice at this point: skip ahead to chapter thirteen to complete the story. And in chapter thirteen, the book of Hosea reaches its most dramatic theological height.

"Yet I am the LORD your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no Savior besides Me." (Hosea 13:4)

God anchors His identity in history: ever since the land of Egypt. He is not a new God, not a God who appeared recently and is still establishing His credentials. He is the God of the Exodus — the God who confronted Pharaoh and split the Red Sea and led His people through the wilderness and gave them water from a rock and bread from heaven. Since Egypt. Since the very beginning of Israel as a nation, He has been their God.

And then: "there is no Savior besides Me."

This is not arrogance — it is the most important truth in the book. Every nation Israel had turned to for salvation — Egypt, Assyria, the Baals, the idols — none of them could save. Not one. The salvation Israel needed was not political or military or agricultural. It was the salvation that only God could provide. And God was declaring, plainly and without apology: I am the only one who can give it to you.

"I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." (Hosea 13:5)

He knew them in the wilderness. Not in their prosperity. Not in the days when the kingdom was great and the Temple was full and the armies were strong. He knew them in the wilderness — in the place of total dependence, where there was no natural resource to trust, where the only explanation for their survival was God.

"When they had pasture, they were filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me." (Hosea 13:6)

The wilderness was where they knew Him. The pasture was where they forgot Him.

Comfort has always been the enemy of devotion. This is not because comfort is inherently evil — God gives good gifts, and abundance is one of them. But when abundance becomes the object of our trust rather than the Giver of it, something goes wrong in the soul. The heart gets exalted — puffed up, self-sufficient, confident in its own management — and in that exaltation, the quiet, steady presence of God gets pushed to the margins.

We forget.

And then comes the most powerful verse in the entire chapter:

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes." (Hosea 13:14)

Read that again slowly.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death.

After chapters of judgment — after the eagle and the whirlwind and the sowing of wind and the wandering among the nations — after all of it — God makes a declaration that transcends the national story of Israel entirely. He is not just talking about bringing exiles home from Assyria. He is speaking of something that reaches all the way to the deepest enemy of human life.

Death itself.

O Death, I will be your plagues. O Grave, I will be your destruction.

The Apostle Paul knew exactly what he was quoting when he wrote to the church in Corinth: "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" He was quoting Hosea. And he was pointing to the One who had fulfilled this promise — the One who on the third day rose from the dead

and destroyed the power of death once and for all.

The ransom God promised through Hosea was paid at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The redemption He declared was accomplished in the resurrection. The grave that Israel feared — the grave that every human being faces — was defeated by the very God who spoke these words to Hosea eight centuries before they were fulfilled.

This is why we study the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. Because they are full of this — full of promises that point directly to Jesus, full of language that makes no complete sense until you see it through the lens of the New Testament. Hosea 13:14 is one of those passages. It is a window through which to see Jesus — long before He came, declaring what He would do.

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## **THE FINAL INVITATION — HOSEA CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

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After the declaration of ransom and redemption, the book of Hosea moves to its final word. And the final word is not judgment. It is an invitation.

*"O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have
stumbled because of your iniquity." (Hosea 14:1)*

Return. The same word that opened chapter six. The same call that has echoed through the entire book. But here, at the end, it arrives with new weight — because we have now seen everything God has been willing to do to make the return possible. The thorns in the path. The lion's tearing. The prophets. The affliction. The ransom from death itself.

All of it was for this moment: Return.

And then God does something extraordinary. He gives Israel the words to bring back with them:

"Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods.'" For in You the fatherless finds mercy.'" (Hosea 14:2–3)

He gives them the prayer.

Think about what this means. Israel does not know what to say. They have been running so long, chasing so many other things, that they have lost the language of return. And so God — like a father who kneels down and teaches a child to say "I'm sorry" — gives them the words. He scripted the confession. He composed the prayer of return for the very people who had been running from Him.

Take away all iniquity. Receive us graciously. We will offer the sacrifices of our lips.

Do you see what has happened? The burnt offerings are gone. The bulls and the rams and the religious system that was supposed to express relationship but had become a substitute for it — all of it has been stripped away by the exile, by the judgment, by the tearing. And what is left? Just words. Honest words. The sacrifices of our lips.

"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

He always wanted the words that came from a real heart. He always wanted the honest cry of a people who knew their need. The exile had finally produced what the prosperity never could: a people willing to come with empty hands.

Assyria shall not save us. They say it out loud now — the thing that God had been trying to show them for generations. The nations cannot save. The alliances cannot save. The horses and the armies and the political maneuvering — none of it saves. For in You the fatherless finds mercy.

And what does God answer?

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him." (Hosea 14:4)

Freely.

That is the word that stops everything. Not "I will love them when they have done enough." Not "I will love them once they have made sufficient restitution." I will love them freely — from the overflow of who I am, not in response to what they have done.

The Hebrew word behind "freely" carries the sense of a gift given with open hands, without condition, without calculation, without any expectation of return. God is not making a business arrangement with Israel. He is offering what He has always wanted to offer: free love, unearned, undeserved, flowing from the inexhaustible source of His own character.

This is grace. This is what the book of Hosea has been building toward from the very first page.

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THE GREEN TREE — HOSEA 14:5–8

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When God pours out His free love on a people who return to Him with empty hands and honest words, what grows?

"I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon." (Hosea 14:5–6)

The lily grows in a single season. It appears quickly and blooms brilliantly. There is an immediacy to it — a freshness, a brightness, a sudden burst of beauty. But the lily's roots are shallow. It does not last forever.

So God promises both. Growth like the lily — quick, visible, beautiful — and roots like Lebanon. The cedars of Lebanon were famous throughout the ancient world for their depth. They were massive trees, with root systems that anchored them against the storms that would topple anything less established. When God promises to give Israel roots like Lebanon, He is promising permanence. Stability. A depth of rootedness in Him that will hold when everything around is shaking.

And the olive tree. The olive was the most practical and precious tree in the ancient Middle East. Its fruit fed families. Its oil lit lamps and anointed kings and preserved food and softened skin. Its wood was dense and enduring. The olive tree did not produce quickly — it took years, sometimes decades, to reach full productivity. But once it was producing, it could bear fruit for centuries.

God is saying: when you return, I will make you like all of these. Immediately beautiful like the lily. Deeply rooted like the cedars. Lastingly fruitful like the olive. Fragrant like Lebanon.

And then this remarkable statement:

"Ephraim shall say, 'What have I to do anymore with idols?' I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me." (Hosea 14:8)

What have I to do anymore with idols?

Notice that the idols are not driven away by force. God does not conduct a campaign to eliminate them. He does not send armies to smash them. What happens is something far deeper and more lasting: the people who have returned and been loved freely and grown like lilies and put down roots like Lebanon simply look at the idols one day and say — what do I need that for?

When you have found the real thing, the imitation loses its appeal. When the God who comes like the dew, who loves freely, who gives roots and beauty and fragrance and fruit — when He becomes your actual daily experience, the idols have nothing left to offer.

"Your fruit is found in Me."

God declares it plainly. The tree where life's fruit actually grows is not the idol on the high place or the carved wooden staff or the foreign alliance or the political calculation. The fruit is in God. It has always been in God. Everything Israel wandered after was empty — and everything they needed was right where they started.

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## THE FINAL WORD — HOSEA 14:9

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The book of Hosea closes with a verse that reads almost like a quiet benediction — a last word spoken not just to Israel but to every reader of every generation who has made it to the end of this journey:

"Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." (Hosea 14:9)

Who is wise? Let him understand.

The invitation is extended to everyone. Hosea does not close by pointing at Israel's failure and saying: see, that is what happens to people who rebel against God. He closes by asking a question that faces every reader personally. Are you wise? Are you prudent? Then understand. Then know.

And what is the conclusion that wisdom and prudence will reach, when applied honestly to everything this book has shown us?

The ways of the LORD are right.

That is the final verdict of Hosea. After all the pages of unfaithfulness and judgment and tender pursuit and morning cloud devotion and whirlwind harvests and prodigal wandering — after all of it — the conclusion is simple and unshakeable. The ways of the LORD are right. The righteous walk in them. Transgressors stumble in them.

The choice is always before us: walk or stumble. Return or wander. Seek the LORD or chase what the world is offering this season. Offer the sacrifices of our lips or keep performing a religion of hollow form.

The ways of the LORD are right.

Everything Hosea lived — the marriage, the children, the purchasing of Gomer with fifteen shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley, the years of prophesying to a people who would not listen — all of it was testimony to one simple truth. The ways of the LORD are right. His covenant is real. His love is free. His invitation is always open.

Return.

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CONCLUSION: WHAT HOSEA TEACHES EVERY GENERATION

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We have walked through all fourteen chapters of Hosea together. Let us stop and take stock of what we have seen.

We have seen that God chose one man's broken marriage to show us the broken heart of God — because sometimes the only sermon that reaches us is the one that is lived, not preached.

We have seen that judgment and grace are not opposites. They are the two hands of the same God reaching for the same people in the same moment. The thorns in the path are love. The lion's tearing is love. The withdrawal is love — because love does not abandon those it pursues; it waits in the place of return until the affliction drives the wanderer home.

We have seen a prophetic timetable embedded in two simple verses — two days and the third day — that maps two thousand years of Jewish history and points to the millennium when Israel will at last live in God's sight.

We have seen the fig tree — the image that will appear again and again in Scripture whenever God speaks of Israel's national life and the signs of the times.

We have seen a ransom declared over death itself, centuries before the one who would pay it was born.

And we have seen a return — not with great ceremony, not with restored armies and rebuilt temples, but with empty hands and honest words. Take away all iniquity. Receive us graciously. For in You the fatherless finds mercy.

And we have heard God's answer: I will heal. I will love freely. I will be like the dew. I will give roots like Lebanon and fruit like the olive tree. And your fruit will be found in Me.

The message of Hosea is not complicated. It never was.

If people develop faith in the Word of God, the Word of God will lead them to Jesus.

Every page of Hosea points that way. The pursuing husband is Jesus. The ransom from death is the cross. The third day resurrection of Israel is shadowed in the resurrection of the One who rose on the third day. The free love poured out without condition is the grace that was poured out at Calvary for every person who has ever wandered and wondered if the door was still open.

It is open. It has always been open.

Who is wise? Let him understand these things.

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# END OF A STUDY OF HOSEA

By Robert J. Neral

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