

## Hosea 11-12 – John Karmelich

1. As I read this text over and over again, I kept thinking of the song titled, "The Long Run". It made me think about seeing God's long-term plans for mankind, His chosen people (The Israelites) and why God bothered with the Israelites in the first place. God could have picked any point in time to send Jesus through any nation. Why did He choose this particular group to work through? If we accept that God decided to work through the Israelites, why does He allow them to suffer so much through history? Why does the bible describe all their mistakes in detail as Hosea has been doing for a bunch of chapters now? Finally, how does all of that affect our lives as Christians?
2. Before I answer those questions, I'd like you to think about another one: If Hosea knew anything about his surroundings, wouldn't he know the Assyrians (the group that conquered his country) was on the warpath? Maybe Hosea was just a pessimist who predicted what was obvious, that a growing empire in that region was about to wipe Israel out? How do we know he was a prophet sent from God and not just somebody who made some logical predictions based on what's going on in the region at that time? Hosea saw his fellow Israelites ignoring God and maybe he saw the threat of the Assyrians and "put two and two together"? We could even argue Hosea was written after all this took place and that's how he knew what happened. The argument against this book being "late-dated" is that Hosea includes details that have been verified through the archeological evidence. My point is Hosea got so many details right, that alone is evidence of him being there when all of this occurred. Can't we even argue Hosea wrote this a century later after that same empire got decimated when much of their army was wiped out in one night as Isaiah tells us?
  - a) The answer to all of these questions, realize Hosea correctly predicted "The Long Run" of what will happen to the nation of Israel. To put this idea another way, no nation in world history has ever been conquered, scattered and then came back together to be a nation.
  - b) Hosea effectively predicts this will happen to the nation of Israel roughly a few centuries after Hosea wrote this. Realize the book of Hosea is quoted in the New Testament. If you believe the writings about Jesus or what Paul wrote is God inspired, then you also have to believe Hosea's book as it written and is also accepted as part of the bible.
3. That leads me back to the idea of the "Long Run". Effectively Hosea "switches gears" for the last 4 chapters of the book, to describe God's long term plans for the Israelites. Like I wrote in opening of my last lesson, God has a "dilemma". That is, He cannot tolerate disobedience, and even those of us who consider ourselves God's chosen people. The dilemma is the classic question, how can God tolerate sin if He is perfect and still let us live forever? How does God punish us for turning from Him and still show us that He has wonderful eternal plans for our future?
  - a) Let me pause here to discuss how Israelites were saved prior to Jesus time: I'm convinced that people are saved based on their knowledge of God (or knowledge that was available to them) and what they did with that knowledge. This is why God has different standards for a baby that dies, versus a person who has lived a full life but pretty much ignored Him all of their life. Did God expect the Israelites who lived prior to Jesus to fully comprehend all that Jesus would do? Of course not. However, collectively they learned from an early age, in studying the bible of a Messiah coming.
  - b) Years ago, I remember reading a story about a very religious Israelite who was dying. He said, "I wish I had the assurance of a Christian of my salvation, because they believe God does it all. With my views, I can only hope I'm good enough to please Him." That's a sad way to die, but it teaches the point that once we accept the idea that it's all up to Him and not us, it changes our whole attitude about who God is and our relationship with Him.
  - c) The point is God's grace existed before Jesus as well as today. He expects us to live by our trust in Him but at the same time live in a way that our lives are a witness for Him. Yes, I believe we're saved by grace alone, but the way we live our lives proves our faith. Those who lived prior to Jesus are judged based on what they knew and how they reacted to it.

4. OK John, this is all interesting theology, and you can assume those of us reading it, pretty much agree with all of it. What does any of this have to do with these two chapters of Hosea? It's for us to realize that Hosea mixes his condemnation of that current generation of Israelites who have turned from God to a point where He's effectively saying, they're beyond hope, the most merciful thing I can do is wipe them out, mixed with a reminder that "it's not over" for the Israelites.
- a) Think about the next generation of Israelites who were forced to live scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire. They could think, "Why should I still bother to be Jewish? After all, God allowed our nation to be destroyed and now it's all over for us." It's necessary to give a long-run view of God's plans for the Israelites so they'd realize this is not "it".
  - b) God made an unconditional promise to give the land of Israel to them, it reads like Hosea, especially this section about their "long run" future is the assurance that this is not "it" and God's not ending His relationship with Israel as a nation.
  - c) Does that mean that because the Israelites still exist today and are back in the land, does it mean that Jesus has to return soon? God's timing is God's timing and there is nothing you or I can do to change His timing. However to mess with God's chosen people is to me like trying to stick a finger in God's eye and I don't want to mess with the consequences. What I'm saying is the fact that Israel still exists today is evidence alone that God still has a long term plan for Israel as a nation as well as the text we'll study in these two chapters.
  - d) What about for us non-Jewish Christians? How does any of this apply? Glad you asked! If nothing else, having a "long run" perspective can help us during the toughest of times if and when we feel like "life is over and there's no reason to go on". Chapters like these do help us to see past our present predicaments and realize God has a long run plan for our lives as well as the lives of our descendants. Think of this lesson as a big reminder to stick it out through the best and worst of times as God has a "long run" plan for Christians just as He does for the Israelites. Realize that God sees the Israelites as nation, and Christians as a united nation in our shared belief that Jesus is God and died for our sins. Each group has their separate beginnings and separate destinies described in the bible. Yes, I believe one is only saved today if one believes Jesus is God. I also believe a future day will come where God will once again focus on Israel as a nation. Romans Chapter 11 discussed that idea as well. I also believe much of Revelation describes life in a Post-Christian era. All I am saying is I'd argue that God has long-term plans for both groups.
5. Finally, before I begin the verse-by-verse discussion of these chapters, realize that Hosea still gets in a "few jabs" at Israel in his day. Hosea's style of writing is what I call "increasing circles". That just means is he likes to return to the same points again and again as to include more information to digest. Therefore, we're not done discussing how life for the Israelites about to end, we're just going to see in the perspective the "Long Run". Yes of course those two words are my lesson title, if you haven't figure it out by now. With that said, time to get started:
6. Chapter 11, Verse 1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."
- a) One of the writing styles one sees throughout the bible is what scholars call "Parallelism". That just mean a style of prophecy of one event is "parallel" in ways to another event. As a simple example, the same mountain where Abraham offered Isaac, is also the same one where God the Father allowed Jesus to die for our sins. All I'm saying is the bible is full of predictions where one event is parallel to another and it ties the predictions together.
  - b) One "parallelism" is that the nation of Israel was not literally born in Egypt, but they grew mightily there. The parallel is that Jesus wasn't literally born in Egypt, but He spent some significant time there in his early childhood. Let me explain further:
    - i) The common ancestor of all Israelites is a man named Jacob. He was born in the land of Israel, but he ended up dying in Egypt where his descendants grew into a great nation that came out of Egypt. In Verse 1, we get the reminder that "God did love that nation" essentially because He did. It wasn't a matter of them being more special than other people. The Israelites were chosen just because they were!

- ii) The "parallelism" is if one reads the stories of Jesus early childhood, he was taken into Egypt by Joseph and Mary to avoid Herod's attempt to kill him. Effectively it is a "word picture" that just as God called the Israelites out of Egypt to be a nation called by God to serve Him, so Jesus was "called out of Egypt" to pay the price for our sins. My point is Matthew quotes Verse 1 and claims it is written about Jesus. If you read this verse here in Hosea, it is hard to see that. Only if you understand that the bible likes to use "parallelisms" as one style of prophecy, it is then one sees the parallel's. (See Matthew 2:15 for this "parallelism".)
  - c) OK over and above the fact that Hosea is giving a prophesy by parallelism, why make this statement here in Verse 1? Why remind Hosea's original Jewish readers that God still has love for them as a nation? It is the reminder that God can't "unlove" what he loves! It is a reminder that God is incapable of lying and incapable of changing His mind. It's a way of reminding us that God is perfect by definition and therefore incapable of lying!
    - i) But aren't there passages where it says God regretted doing something? Yes, such passages exist, but I'll argue they are from "our perspective". If we believe God is perfect by definition, that means He knows all things, can't learn, and is aware of what He is doing and why He is doing things. When we read statements like God regretted something (e.g., 1st Samuel 15:35 says that God regretted that He made Saul king over Israel.) that does not mean God "pouted and kicked the floor" as He said, "I never should have done that". What it does mean is the outcome of the life of Saul caused more harm than good and the regret is sorrow over what did occur because that event happened.
    - ii) The way I was taught this, is God has a "perfect will" for our live and God also has a "I'll allow it to happen" will for our lives. Think of it in terms of being a father of a young child. That young child really wants something that you as a parent don't think is the best choice to make. Still we give that gift to our child because we love them. It's like when we allow our children to learn a lesson the hard way, can also be compared to how God's "permissive will" exists and from our perspective it can seem like God has regrets as it was not the best choice we have made in life.
  - d) Meanwhile, I think we're still back on Verse 1. Another reason Hosea opened this section of his letter with that thought, is he wants to remind the Israelites, "It's not over". It about the fact they are about to go into captivity and therefore Hosea wanted to give a long run perspective by reminding us that God has always loved His chosen people from the time they were chosen and what's implied is God can't stop loving what He's loved. All of this is a way of telling the Israelites, "it's not over!" Yes, they're going into the penalty box for ignoring Him but it doesn't mean His relationship with Israel is over despite the fact they are being kicked out of the land for a period of time.
  - e) Finally, keep this verse in mind the next time the world is falling apart and you think God must not love me as He allowed "this" to happen. Having that long-term perspective can help us to realize that God has a purpose for allowing us to go through tough situations. Effectively, this verse is a reminder that just because things are tough right now, does not mean He has abandoned us in any way. He still has a long-term plan for those of us who trust in Him for our eternal destiny.
  - f) In the meantime, look, there is a Verse 2!
7. Verse 2: But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.
- a) We're jumping from the fact that God still loves the Israelites to explaining why they are being punished in the first place. I warned you in the opening comments that Hosea will still get a few more shots in at why they are being punished, and here's one of those shots in Verse 2 of this lesson. The specific point is God was blessing that nation and in turn the Israelites living there were collectively honoring other gods (called Baal) for their success.

- b) At points like this, I always think of the archeology evidence found in Israel of the periods before versus after the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. When they study the ruins of those who lived before such conquests, archeologists are amazed by the number of statues found of idols. If one studies the archeological evidence of life after they returned to their land, the idolatry was minimal. My point is it took an event as strong as being kicked out of that land to rid the Israelites of that issue. It makes you wonder how far God will go in your life and my life to draw us closer to Him when we turn away. That was the topic of the last lesson if you didn't read it. In the meantime, we're reminded here of the fact that the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom were experiencing prosperity as they were about to be captured and they were too busy thanking false gods instead of giving God Himself the credit for their success. If you think life is any better today, look at how many people give themselves the credit for their success or other "people" as opposed to God Himself.
8. Verse 3: It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. <sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.
- a) We're back to "parallelism's" in these two verses. One of the great joys in life is being able to teach a child how to walk. At first, we hold their hands and help them. Eventually we have to let them go and let them fall and learn.
- b) With that image in mind, re-read this verse. For my newcomers, Ephraim is one of the 12 tribes of Israel and the dominant tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Therefore when Hosea writes "Ephraim", it is just a nickname for that kingdom. Anyway, Hosea's making the point that when that nation first started, God was "working behind the scenes" to help that nation seek Him. Let me put it this way: God allowed that kingdom to exist for about 200 years before it came to an end, so in that sense God was protecting them all that time. There were a number of prophets specifically sent to preach to the kings of that Northern Kingdom with Elijah and Elisha being the more famous ones. If you don't know anything about the history of that kingdom, the fact that God allowed them to exist all that time is a proof that He cared about them as a unique nation.
- c) But John, the verse says "I bent down to feed them". One of the rules of studying the bible is if a literal explanation makes perfect sense, don't look for any other sense. If that literal interpretation doesn't make sense, then one looks for other explanations. Obviously God does not literally reach down from heaven to feed us. Therefore, this phrase is not meant as a literal phrase, but simply the fact that God blessed by providing rain so that crops can grow and animals can be fed, or it can refer to the "manna" He sent their ancestors prior to them entering the land. The idea of "I lifted the yoke from their neck" can refer to the fact that God lead their ancestors out of slavery as well as the fact the Israelites have not been in slavery to others for the past few hundred years.
- d) If you haven't figured it out by now, the underlying point is God has been blessing us the entire time we've been living whether we realized it or not. I recall receiving a letter some time back from a man who was complaining his life was ruined to date. I wrote back and was trying to help him get some perspective on how God has been watching over his life the entire time. As the old saying goes, "You can't change your past, just learn from it as not to repeat the same mistakes". My point is any of us can look at lives and see it as one big failure or one big success if we get our perspective right. God does not expect you to act like anyone else! He desires we be a good witness for Him in all that we do. He then promises to bless our lives not by giving us fame or fortune, but by giving us far more joy in this life than we can ever have by just trying to acquire stuff or fame or anything else!
- e) The key point of these two verses is simply about realizing how much God has blessed us over the course of our lives whether we realize it or not. Even if we feel we've ruined our lives to date, realize God's kept us alive to this moment and we're free to use our time and our resources to make a difference for Him in the world around us!

9. Verse 5: "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?"
- In the past few lessons, I stated that some of the Israelites from the Northern Kingdom did go to Egypt as they thought, Egypt is a great power and the Assyrians can't conquer them.
  - In this verse, Hosea predicts what soon will become obvious as some of the Israelites went to Egypt for safety and most of the survivors of the Assyrian siege were literally forced to go live in other parts of that empire.
  - If nothing else verses like this are reminders to anyone reading Hosea and who takes their relationship with God seriously, that God "isn't to be messed with". Just as He can punish that nation "that badly" for ignoring Him, so He can punish us equally as badly if we also choose to ignore Him with our lives. (Remember I'm also speaking to Christians here!)
10. Verse 6: Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.
- One of the tough aspects of living in a big city, is one has to drive through neighborhoods where it is common to see bars on every window. There is such a fear of crime that many have to take drastic measures to have peace living at home. Here Hosea is saying, in spite of every effort people take to protect themselves, the swords of conquerors will win out in that day. It's another reminder that He allows horrid things to happen to people called by Him ultimately to glorify Him through those horrid events.
  - The specific's here is the Israelites just wanted to live out their own lives and ignore how God wanted them to live. They just wanted to "do their own thing" and ignore God. We get a grim reminder of the results of living that way here in Verse 6. If you ever need an incentive to go to church when you don't feel like, keep in mind that God is very willing to do whatever it takes to draw us closer to Him whether we're going through good times or bad times at this moment in our lives. That's what these Israelites had to learn the hard way and hopefully we can learn from their mistakes before God's got to get that drastic in our lives as well. That's what is to be learned from this verse.
  - Meanwhile, Verse 7 is just as tough.
11. Verse 7: My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.
- As I talked about in the last lesson, there is always a "too late". Let's be honest, most of us are more than willing to cry out to God for help when life is falling apart. The important question is are we willing to seek Him when life is going well as well as going badly? The big question is "Is there ever a "too late" period in life to seek God?"
  - OK then, when is too late? The short version is we're not God and we can't read his mind. All I know is when people spend their lives turning from God, with some rare exceptions it is unusual for a person to change late in life. I'm not saying we should ever give up on a loved one. As most Christians know, it is up to God to change people's hearts. Christians are just called to be a witness for Him. As many Christian pastors correctly say, we do not get notches in our belt for every person we saved. Our job is just to be a witness for Him in whatever capacity God calls us to do.
  - In the meantime the evidence against the Israelites in Northern Israel, it's amazing that He waited as long as He did. For most of us, we'd give up a lot sooner than that. What about little children who died during that attack? That's one reason why I believe in a God who will judge all people fairly. Let's be honest, if this life is all that there is, this life would be a very unfair place to live. Bottom line is for those Israelites back then, "too late" is there. May our societies turn to God and may we commit our own lives to make a difference for Him before He says, "it's too late" for us.
  - That leads me back to the "Long Run" argument of this lesson. Let's face it, if this life is all that there is, there would be no long run. That's why Hosea gets back to the long run plan that God has for those Israelites in the next verse.

12. Verse 8: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.
- a) Since I assume most of you know who Ephraim is by now (a nickname for the Northern Israel kingdom) the first question to ask here is who or where is Admah and Zeboim? Let me save most of the trouble of Googling it! The short version is when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, two other cities were also destroyed. Those two cities are the ones listed in this verse. (See Deuteronomy 29:23.)
  - b) Ok, that event occurred roughly a millennium earlier. Why bring that up here? If Hosea wanted to say God would destroy the Northern Kingdom, why not state the more famous example of Sodom and Gomorrah? Unless you're a bible trivia expert, why bring up these two small cities, especially given the fact Hosea is speaking to a bunch of people who may not know their bible that well? The answer is it's Hosea's way of saying, I can't treat those people that I love like the ones who are condemned and long forgotten about!
  - c) Think about the situation from the perspective of those living in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Their world is about to end. Those that survive the siege will be moved all over an empire and never see their families and friends again. If one is taken down that low, can't we start thinking, "God's forgotten about us as much as those who died over a 1,000 years ago and we barely think about." This verse is the reminder that God will never give up on anybody who has called to be with Him forever.
  - d) Try to imagine the worst possible thing to happen to you or your family. You're thinking that God has abandoned you and there is no hope. It's verses like this that remind us that in the worst of times, He's still there, He still cares for us and He wants to pull us through that situation. My favorite description of God in those types of situations is He provides us with a "rope line" to pull us through those tough times. All I'm saying is we shouldn't ever feel abandoned by God no matter what we have to deal with in any given situation.
13. OK then, Verse 9: I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.
- a) Pause and consider the history of the Jewish people even since they were taken out of the land of Israel several millenniums ago. Until about 50 years ago, they were scattered over the world. They've been the scapegoats for lots of persecutions including the Holocaust. Even in the land of Israel today, they are constantly threatened with expulsion and it feels like most of the world wants them dead as a country. For most Jewish people throughout world history, to be a Jewish person by birth is effectively a curse over much of the world.
    - i) My point is despite that constant fear of extinction, God's promising here that He's not done with Israel as a nation. God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that God will give the land of Israel to Abraham's descendants. Of course, it does not mean all Jewish people are saved, just as some of Abraham descendants were not part of the Jewish race. As a devout Christian, I hold the biblical view that we are living in a 2,000 year and counting time era where to be saved means one has to believe Jesus is God and that He paid the price for every sin we'll ever commit. I equally believe a future time era will come where God will once again focus on the nation of Israel as to draw Jewish people close to Him. That's what Chapter 11 of the book of Romans focuses on as well as much of the book of Revelation.
    - ii) In the meantime, God's promising way back here in Hosea that God's not through with the Nation of Israel despite the fact that nation is about to be destroyed.
  - b) Let me pause and consider something related for the moment: Ever go through periods of doubt that the bible is real? After all, there are billions of people in the world and there is a huge universe out there. How can God be big enough to do all of that? All I'm saying is in moments of doubts, consider the history of the Israelite nation. Their history and given the fact they're still around is a pretty good proof that all of this is very real!

14. Verse 10: They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.
- a) A logical question to ponder after what I just wrote is when will all of this occur? It is not like God literally roars like a lion. So when and how will God call Israel back?
  - b) A key word in this verse is the word "west". Let me explain.
    - i) When the Israelites were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians (the "North" was taken by the Assyrians, the "South" by the Babylonians) they had to travel to the east to get to those empires.
    - ii) When the Persians conquered the Babylonians, the Israelites that did return to the land of Israel came home from the east.
    - iii) To the west of Israel is the Mediterranean ocean.
    - iv) Now think about world history this way. In the history of civilization no group of people who were conquered and scattered have ever come back to form a country again. Yet Israel, in one specific declaration in 1948, became a country again.
    - v) Most of the Israelites who moved to Israel since 1948 have come from the west.
  - c) Let me put it this way, am I 100% positive "God roaring like a lion" refers to the nation of Israel coming back together again? Of course not. However, for a group of people with a famous history that the Israelites have coming back to form a country again to me, would be a "like a lion roaring" in terms of the great sudden change in world history.
    - i) Finally, could there be some event in the future where say most Israelites do move back to Israel? I never put anything past God. However, given the "west" factor, I would argue that within the last century we've literally seen this verse come true.
15. Verse 11: They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the LORD.
- a) OK after a rousing speech about the "west", the next verse mentions Israelites returning to from Egypt and Assyria. Most of you know by now that some Israelites fled to Egypt for safety and most of the survivors in the "North" were taken to Assyria, so what does Hosea mean that they will return like birds and doves?
  - b) To understand, remember that the Northern Kingdom were taken to what is Iraq today by force. When the Babylonians conquered the "South" roughly a 100 years later, that empire was also based out what is Iraq today. When the Persians (think Iran) later conquered the Babylonians, the Israelites were free to go back to Israel. The point is they were not forced to go back to Israel, but simply "free as birds" to go wherever they want.
  - c) Therefore, Hosea correctly predicts the future of about 200 years later when the Israelites were free as birds to go home.
  - d) That means Verse 10 is a long-term prediction and Verse 11 is a "short-term" prediction.
16. Verse 12: Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, the house of Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.
- a) Before I discuss Verse 12, note the Jewish version of the bible includes this verse as part of Chapter 12. The Christian version has it as part of Chapter 11. Since this lesson covers both chapters, I'll just say it's a non issue to me.
  - b) Now let me return to my "Long Run" theme. The last two verses discuss God's long-term future for the Israelites. Verse 12 is back to why: In effect, Verse 12 summarizes most of the last few chapters: Israelites have ignored God for a long time and now have to suffer the consequences.
  - c) So if the condemnation is against the "North", why is Judah (nickname for the "South") in this verse? The short version is the fall of the North is meant as a warning to the South of "They better get their act together, or they will be doomed soon too!" Notice the South is called "unruly" and the North is described as "deceit". It's like saying the South is bad, but they haven't reached to really bad level of the North, which must suffer badly at this time.
  - d) Bottom line, the "North" is about to get it and the "South" isn't far behind.

- e) Before I move on to Chapter 12, I've been rambling about Israel past and present for about a page now. How does any of this affect us non-Jewish Christians? Easy. We must realize God works in consistent patterns. How He works with the Jewish people gives us clues of how He works with Christians. Yes of course we Christians are saved by God's grace. All I am saying is when we fail to be a witness for Jesus, we too can have our "witness ended" just as the Israelites did here. However, just like the Israelites, just because we individuals can suffer for failing to be a witness for God, that does not mean God's through with us as a group (of Christians). It just means He will work with others willing to be a witness for Him. As one pastor I heard once say, "May we never new wine into old wineskins". What that means is we should never rely upon yesterday's victories, to realize how God desires to work with us today or tomorrow.
  - f) OK, enough about us. Back to the Israelites.
17. Chapter 12, Verse 1: Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.
- a) If you haven't figured it out by now Hosea loves to use word-pictures to describe how life was going around him. The cliché (feeds on the wind) is like saying we're wasting our life so bad it's as if we're just throwing things into the wind to see where they land. When we hear that line, we can think of the famous cliché, "harvest the wind, repeat the whirlwind" which I discussed in the last lesson. The rest of the verse gives specifics. Let me explain:
    - i) The idea of multiplying lies (I suspect) is about claiming they're trusting in God, as they turn to both Egypt and Assyria with gifts trying to appease both armies as to keep themselves alive.
    - ii) But John, if we were a small group with one large army on one side (Assyria) and another large army on the other side (Egypt), wouldn't we too try to appease both groups to stay alive? The issue isn't about trying to do the right thing, the issue is about ignoring God in order to fix a situation!
    - iii) Let me explain it: God expects us Christians to live within the framework of what the bible teaches about how to live. We are to honor Jesus as God, use our lives to make a difference for Him, respect our leaders and live by the principals as taught in the bible. So does that mean we have to eat kosher? No, as the New Testament is a guide for us as to how to interpret the Old Testament.
    - iv) Bottom line is the Israelites around Hosea, were ignoring God and honoring other false gods in order to appease both of these powerful nations. A modern example might be if we agree to give up Christianity out of fear of what society might do to us because we don't agree to live like non-believers around us!
  - b) Now notice the literalness of this verse. Realize that Assyria and Egypt were enemies in a sense they were both rivals to be the "big kid on the block". With those Israelites making a peace treaty with Assyria and also sending presents to Egypt, they were trying to pit one side versus the other. Essentially what Hosea's implying here that God desires to protect His own people and they should not look to their enemies for protection. The same way He would not want us to run to different religions or no religion when life got tough!
  - c) OK now that I've beaten that point to death, let's try Verse 2:
18. Verse 2: The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.
- a) Another thing to grasp about Hosea, is that even though his message focuses on the fate of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the "South" doesn't get off scot-free. A big reason why Hosea wrote this book is that he wanted to give a warning to others (think the "South" in this case) claiming to trust in God. The point to us is if we are claiming to be Christians, it does mean that God expect us to act like it! That means He expects us to use our lives as a living witness for Him. He expects us to live differently enough that "If we were arrested for being a Christian, there would be enough evidence to convict us!"

- b) As I've been beating the point home all through this lesson, the Southern Kingdom called Judah is about 100 years away from their own doom as they too were collectively getting to a point where they were ignoring God. They were falsely thinking, "God can't destroy this place, His temple is here. No matter how bad we act, He can't destroy it." Americans can have the same arrogance if we think God brought most of our ancestors here in order to be a living witness for Him. All I am saying is no location, or Christian community can think of themselves as "off limits" to God's wrath if we fail to be a witness for Him.
  - c) While we're grasping that tough thought, Hosea's going to give a little history about the common ancestor of all Jewish people, Jacob as an example of how God expects us to act as well as how His people have acted.
  - d) Let me add Verse 3 here as that begins this history lesson on Jacob:
19. Verse 3: In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. <sup>4</sup> He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there-- <sup>5</sup> the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown!
- a) First, a basic Jewish history lesson. The first man that God called to be the founder of the Israelite nation was a man named Abraham. One of his sons was named Isaac. One of his sons was named Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, and that became the 12 tribes of Israel. Yes, we can consider Abraham the father of the Jewish nation but it was his grandson that was the common ancestor of the 12 tribes of Israel.
  - b) That quick history lesson leads us to a couple of key events in Jacob's life. When he was born, his name means "heel catcher". That is because he was one of twins, and as he was coming out of the womb, he grabbed his brother's heel. The point behind that birth story is that Jacob desired to have the rights of a first-born son. He grabbed his older brother's heel as he came out of the womb. There's the famous story of his mother disguising Jacob as his brother in order to fool his dying father that Jacob really was his brother. My point is simply that as we read all through Jacob's life that despite his problems, he desired that God bless his life.
    - i) There's a point to all of this. Before I explain that point, let me quickly talk about a second Jacob story here where he struggled with an angel desiring to be blessed by God. Realize that angels are effectively servants of God. If He wanted to bring an end to Jacob's life, He could have done it then and there through that angel. What I am getting at is God allowed that struggle to go on for some lesson He wanted to teach Jacob and us.
    - ii) The lesson has to do with the life lesson of "Letting go and trusting God". If we do read that story, we get the idea that Jacob wanted God to bless his life. That event is in Genesis 32. In that story, the angel hurt Jacob by permanently harming his hip joint. The reason God allowed that hip pain and Jacob to wrestle all night with the angel has to do with letting go and trusting God! It's about realizing God wants to bless us just because He does and it's not a thing we are to earn by trying harder. As I like to say, we don't do good works to earn His love, we do them in order to be a witness for Him, period!
    - iii) One last note about the verse itself. It takes place somewhere called "Bethel". That is why that place is named in Verse 4.
  - c) OK John, that's all well and good, and you can assume we know this story or at the least, we know the principal that God wants to bless us just because He does. Why does Hosea bring this up here? Great question. The answer is because the Israelites were guilty of the crime of "going through the motions" but not really trusting God. For example if we think, "I've gone to church this week, I can cross that off my to do list, so now I can go do what I want, as I'm covered with God for a week". That's not the type of attitude God is looking for in our lives. God wants to bless us not because we've done good works for Him, but because He wants to bless us period! That's the point Hosea is making in these verses.

- d) All of that leads me to Verse 5. The most holy name of God "LORD" is invoked twice here in that verse. It's kind of like asking, who do you think you're messing with here? I'm the God who created everything, let alone your life! Since I'm perfect by definition, I have no need of you to do anything to earn My love! So stop trying just as Jacob stop trying. Just accept that I love You and live as witness for Me. That's the point of these verses.
- e) OK, now that Hosea's beaten over their heads what the "South" Kingdom is doing wrong, it's time for Hosea to explain how God expects us to act:
20. Verse 6: But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. <sup>7</sup> The merchant uses dishonest scales; he loves to defraud. <sup>8</sup> Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."
- a) If Hosea uses the phrase, "return to your God" that implies they've left Him to begin with. So if God is everywhere, how do we leave God in the first place? The issue is not being a good witness for Him! That's how we "leave Him". From the middle of Verse 6 to Verse 8 are examples of how the Israelites have "left God" based on how they were living.
- b) Therefore, let's get into the specific's to see if the "shoe fits". First and foremost Hosea says we are to "maintain love and justice". The idea of love is about putting the needs of others as a priority over our own needs. The idea of justice is not vigilante justice, but about not letting bad deeds go unpunished. The idea is God is a God of "doing the right thing". It's a principal that applies to justice equally as much as it applies to putting other's needs as a priority over our own needs.
- c) OK, if that's too "pie in the sky" for you, Hosea gets more specific here. He describes the merchants in a market place as using dishonest scales as if to defraud the customers. It'd be like if we put gasoline in our cars and we were really putting in 9/10 of a gallon when the sign says we put a gallon in. (Or a liter for my European readers!) The point here is Hosea's accusing the Israelites of being thieves in their dealing with each other. That's a good example of not doing "justice". I suspect the underlying point is that "justice" is not just about murder or major thief, but about how we live our daily lives, which should be a witness for God, and He's very aware of how we may have defrauded people!
- d) All of that leads to Verse 8. Hosea using the Northern Kingdom's nickname of Ephraim in that verse to say that "I'm wealthy therefore I can get away with that stuff". Yes we are all too aware that criminals with good lawyers do get away with things. However, a perfect God knows all things and the point is what they may get away with "now" will not be any sort of permanent thing. That's why the Northern Kingdom is going into captivity as they failed to be a witness for God and were trusting in their wealth.
- e) By the way, I'm not saying wealth is evil. Money is "neutral" and can be used for God or it can be used only to enrich our own lives. The point here is the Israelites were trusting in their wealth for their survival and trying to bribe their way out of ignoring God!
- f) In the meantime, I interrupted God speaking through Hosea as he's lecturing them here!
21. Verse 9: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed feasts. <sup>10</sup> I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them."
- a) My loose translation, "Who do you think you're messing with here? Don't you realize I'm the God who put you in this land in the first place! I'm the one who sent prophets to you to let all of you know how I expect you to live, let alone give you My laws!
- b) With that said, let me discuss "tents" for a moment. (Some translations say "booths" and I will discuss that fact as well.) The essential idea is that several times per year God wanted the Israelites to gather together to worship Him. That's means lots of temporary shelters popped up in Jerusalem at such festivals. What was common was to build "booths" made out of tree branches for those shelters. Part of the idea was for the Israelites to recall that just as their ancestors had to live in tents as they went from Egypt to Israel, so they had to understand how God wanted them to have a "light touch" in this world by living in tents!

- c) It's like the idea that Jesus taught that we are "in this world but not of this world". (John 18:36 is an example of that principal.) However, that's not Hosea's only point here. He is using tent living as an illustration of how the Israelites will live again! Let me explain:
    - i) As the Israelites were taken out of that land, they must have had to live in shelters such as tents again. Yes it can be figurative in the sense that for them to live away from the land of Israel is like "wandering the world in tents again" and it can also be literal in terms of how they were transported out of that land.
    - ii) Either way, it's describing the punishment of failing to be a witness for God!
  - d) Meanwhile, Hosea's back to describing their sins in Verse 11:
22. Verse 11: Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field.
- a) I read this verse and my logical first question is, "where is Gilead and Gilgal? Are they the same place? I searched both in the bible and found dozens of references. Then I narrowed my search to the era when the kings ruled over the two Israelite Kingdoms. All you have to realize about these two places is they were both famous among the two great prophets sent to the Northern Kingdom (Elijah and Elisha).
  - b) Hosea's simple point here is the places where you should remember where great miracles did occur within the history of the Northern Kingdom are now places where sacrifices are being made to Baal (a false deity). Those altars will end up being like a pile of worthless stones, which are gathered up when a plowed field is cleared out.
  - c) To make it simple, the things that are dedicated to false gods will be wiped out. Hosea is giving one of his colorful illustrations of how much "life will change around here" once it begins. The "it" is the Assyrian invasion of that kingdom which destroyed it soon after all of this was predicted. It's Hosea's way of saying all efforts by "My People" to worship any god but the true God will be wiped out.
  - d) In context the previous few verses discussed the fact that God was behind the effort to get the Israelites to that land in the first place. Then God sent prophets (Elijah and Elisha are two of the prime examples) to guide them how to live. By Verse 11, this is God's effective comment of "This is how you pay me back by offering sacrifices to other gods?"
  - e) The point for you and me is to stop and consider how far God has brought us to this point in our lives. Those of us who've been Christians for a good while can now realize how we have been guided by God all these years. Yet we easily turn from Him in spite of how He has worked in our lives. These verses are the reminder that, "If God's gotten us this far in life, what makes us think He's abandoned us now?" That too is a good long-run thought.
23. Verse 12: Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep.
- a) Meantime, Hosea's still using examples from Israel's history in order to teach the Israelites about the "long-run" perspective. Time for another quick background story:
    - i) This verse summarizes a famous story of Jacob, the common father of all 12 Jewish tribes. The short version is Jacob lived in a foreign land to escape from his brother who Jacob was afraid was going to kill him. During that time, Jacob worked many years for the father in law of his two wives. During that time, God preserved him in spite of problems with the wives and the father in law. There were a lot of bad things that happened to Jacob, but despite them, God still had plans for His life as God preserved Jacob through that time period. (Genesis 29 tells this story.)
  - b) The point of telling that story in context of the surrounding verses, is simply to tell us that despite all the bad things that happened to Jacob in those years, God still persevering him as God has wonderful long term plans for Jacob to start the Israelite nation. The point for you and me is despite whatever hardships we might face (imagine going through a siege where we lose family members and the survivors are scattered) and in spite of all of that, God is saying He still has long-run plans for us and our descendants!

- c) I have to admit, it's hard to think of all this long-run perspective as good news. When we are about to face something as horrid as a siege, we may think this is "it" for me and all of my descendants. That's why God through Hosea is reminding us that despite whatever it is we must face in life, "This is not it". God has promised wonderful eternal blessings for all of us who are trusting in Jesus for our salvation. There is nothing we can do to earn all of that blessing, we just have to accept it. The "then what" for us is to use our lives to be a living witness for Jesus. In fact, it's the failure of the Northern Kingdom to be that witness that caused their downfall! That's why Hosea's effectively lecturing us on the importance of being the type of witness God desires we be: That we use our time and our lives as to make a difference for Him in the world.
- d) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but I have two more verses to discuss in this lesson.
24. Verse 13: The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.  
<sup>14</sup> But Ephraim has bitterly provoked him to anger; his Lord will leave upon him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.
- a) This chapter ends with one more, "Here's what I've (God) have done for you example. It's followed by one more example of how the Northern Kingdom effectively responded to all of that guidance. Let me explain:
- b) When Verse 13 says that God used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, that has to be referring to Moses himself, who lead the Israelites all those years. Think about Moses this way: Did he say to the Israelites, "OK boys, I got you out of Egypt, Israel is "that way", so you're pretty much on your own from this point"? Of course not. Moses wrote down the five books of the "Torah" (Genesis to Deuteronomy) so the Israelites literally could have a set of guidelines to understand how God wants us to live.
- c) Hosea's point here is that God didn't get them this far, just to abandon them. Speaking of abandonment, that's Hosea's accusation of the Israelites in Verse 14. The short version is that the Israelites living there have collectively abandoned God to a point where from our perspective it seems like God is pouring out His anger at them.
- d) First a quick word about God and anger. I've always argued that God who is perfect will have no needs whatsoever. What I'm asking is how can God be loving and angry at us at the same time? The way to look at is to realize God's "perfectly loving to us at all time" as He is "perfectly angry at sin" at all times. That's why hell isn't for just 100 years or another time period. It's about perfect anger for rejecting His free offer to spend our eternity with Him by accepting His free gift of salvation.
- e) That theological realization leads me back to the Israelites here in Verse 14. God is saying to them in effect, "You want to abandon Me, great, I'll give you what You want as I'll take away My protection of all of you and give you what you really want: Life without Me!
- f) All of that leads us back to God's dilemma of what do I do with a group of people who've been called to be My witnesses to the world, but they turn from Me? How I can abandon those I've called to be with Me forever, but at the same time show that if we fail to live as He desires, there are horrid consequences. The answer is our witness for Him can come to an end, but that's a separate issue from individual salvation.
- g) If we get nothing else out of this lesson, it's the idea that to fail to be a witness for God in our lives has serious and painful consequences. God may still have wonderful plans for our lives, but we can't appreciate them if we're busy turning from Him. That's why this "Long Run" perspective is so essential to living the Christian life. Let me try to sum all of this up in my closing prayer:
25. Heavenly Father, First, we thank You that You have chosen us to be with You forever. May we never fail to appreciate what a great gift that is, that the God who created all things, cares for us and wants to use our lives for His glory. May we never waste the most valuable thing You give us, our time, as we use it to make a difference for You. May we develop a healthy long-run view that You are always there and are guiding us through this life! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.