

1. Why would God send people to hell forever? If someone committed murder, why can't they just be punished for say 1,000 years or just end their existence? Why does God require people to live by His rules anyway? Doesn't free will mean we can do whatever we want? If we're called to be one of His, why do we have to act differently? Doesn't God know we're imperfect? Why is it that we can't just do what we want when we want? Now if that isn't a hard way to start off a lesson, I don't know what is.
 - a) My point is these chapters read like God's "prosecution's case against us", which happens to be my lesson title. I'll argue that Hosea is essentially taking dictation from God in these chapters. He's saying that God expects us to live a certain way and we're forever going to suffer if we fail to live as He desires. My simple job is to explain why that's true and what are the consequences if we fail to live, as God desires we live.
 - b) For those of you who've ever studied Romans Chapter 1, these two chapters are sort of an equivalent to that chapter. Probably the most important thing to get out of this lesson is a reminder that a God who's perfect requires us to be perfect to spend eternity with Him.
 - c) That simply means we can't earn our salvation. Most of us know that. The question then becomes since we as imperfect creatures, who can never be good enough for God, why do we have to modify our behavior? Why do these chapters lay out God's case for a behavior modification program if God Himself paid the complete price for our sins?
 - d) The answer is God expects us to be a witness for Him. He requires that those people who are called to be His witnesses "act like it" and modify our behavior accordingly. When we fail to do so, we're under His judgment. These chapters explain exactly what that means.
 - e) Let me put it this way: To be a Christians is not to pray a specific prayer and then go live however we want. The proof of our Christianity is how we act after we're saved. Yes we are only saved by our faith in God alone, but I'm positive there are rewards in heaven that we receive based on how we act as believers.
 - f) That leads me back to the Israelites that Hosea addresses in this book. The key point is for them to realize God has separated them to be His witnesses and they're ignoring Him. So here is His case for condemnation (through both these chapters) so people can realize why it is God is condemning those who refuse to trust in Him as the main focus of their lives.
 - g) OK you may say, that's not me. I trust that Jesus paid the full price for my sins and I try to be a good witness for Him, constantly learn about Him and I'm involved in things so I can make a difference for Him. So why should we read this lesson if it's not about me?" It's to realize that these chapters tell us what God requires of us. These chapters are great one to shows nonbelievers what are His standards to live by. Then it reminds us of what are the consequences of turning from Him if we fail to live, as He desires. For those of us who've dedicated our lives to serving God, we're getting a reminder list of why it's worth the cost as our eternity depends upon how we act here and now.
2. Before I get into some of the specifics of this lesson, let me address the "living forever" issue since I brought it up in the opening questions. If God created us, why can't He just destroy us as some cults teach as well as other religions? Why do we exist forever? The short version is God cannot "un-create" what He has created. I like using the illustration of computer hardware and software. For example if you buy a blank computer disk or a "thumb drive" it weighs exactly the same if it's blank or full of files. The real us, is like the software on that disk. That software doesn't have any weight and can be transferred elsewhere. The illustration isn't perfect, as software can be deleted, but to state the premise again, God can't un-create what He has made in the first place. My point is God created us with a purpose: To be with Him forever. How we live becomes the evidence to others of the choices we make. To put it another way, if we're in heaven forever, others will be in hell forever. Therefore, we have to accept the forever aspect whether we like it or not.

- a) I'm saying all of that to understand why people go to either heaven or hell forever. It isn't because we've sinned "this much" and therefore have to be punished "that much". What is necessary to realize is the perfection of God. His standards are perfection and if we're not willing to be perfectly forgiven, then we get what we choose, eternity without Him. That's why people spend eternity in hell, because they choose not to be in His presence for all of eternity. Like I stated in the last lesson, "The gates of hell will be locked from the inside." (C.S. Lewis).
3. All of that theology leads me back to this lesson. Chapter 4 is God laying out His case why most people will have to spend eternity in hell. Chapter 5 is God executing judgment based on all the charges laid out in Chapter 4. Yes this book was written 2,700 years ago. That's a lot of people to be judged between now and then. One thing to accept is if God is perfect by definition, then His standards don't change over time. His standard of perfection exists today as it did back then.
- a) Think about His judgment this way: If His standard for us wasn't perfection, how could we ever know if we're good enough God? How would we know if our good deeds were enough if we have some standard other than perfection? That's why we Christians accept the idea that God requires perfection to be with Him forever. We can only reconcile our imperfection and God's perfection is by God Himself paying for our sins. Which leads me back to the important question: If we accept all of that, why does our behavior matter? As I like to joke, there are no guillotines in churches. It's not as if, "Now we're saved, so I will now kill you." We're saved for a purpose, to be His witnesses to a world around us that is rejecting His free gift of salvation. Anyway, that's why we're saved and that's why we're not killed right after salvation. We're called to live to make a difference for Him.
- b) With that said, Chapter 4 lays out the case how God expects us to live. Chapter 5 lays out the case of how the execution of His case is to take place. If you got that, you're also ready to study the details as we go through these two fairly short chapters.
- c) Therefore, I ask that you join me as we go verse by verse through these two chapters.
4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.
- a) As I love to state, the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums after the book was written. I mention that here, because putting a chapter break here was a good idea. We're all done discussion Hosea's family life. There's no more of "Here is what I named my kids and I had to buy back my unfaithful life at a slave auction" as was the main topics of those opening three chapters. It's as if the opening three chapters were used as illustrations for God to make His case against how the Israelites, were acting at that time, especially those living in the Northern Israelite Kingdom. Now here is the judgment itself in this chapter.
- b) Speaking of things I love to state over and over again (because there are always those who are new to these lessons), at this time in history, Israel was split into two kingdoms. Those who lived in the Northern Kingdom with Hosea were predominately non-believers.
- c) Only a small percentage of those living up North believed in God, which is why Hosea is giving a message of condemnation to them. Just to drive home Hosea's point, at this point in history, the Northern Kingdom was about 20 years away from coming to an end. Those who lived through that destruction were relocated elsewhere in a large empire. The rules of that empire were that the conquered were to be separated so they wouldn't revolt! All I'm saying is really bad news is on the horizon for the people Hosea was addressing with this book. Therefore, it was necessary to understand why judgment is coming down with the end being in site. That's one reason why Hosea is so tough on them.
- d) The important point for us is we Christians like those Israelites have been called to go be a witness for Jesus to the world around us. If we fail to live as God desires we do, we'll also suffer a horrid fate if we ignore the reason God's saved us in the first place!
- e) Believe it or not, that little lecture leads us perfectly to the opening verse of Chapter 4.

- i) The verse starts with Hosea reminding his readers that He's speaking directly for God in this book. The most holy name of God is invoked which is why the word "LORD" is in all capital letters. To be called to be a prophet of God means one has to be 100% accurate in their predictions. It can also mean He'll do dramatic things in order to get our attention. If God can order Hosea to give his children negative prophetic names and buy his wife back at a slave auction is a life most of us would not choose to live. My point is that Hosea was called to be God's prophet. We have to accept His message as it's meant for us just as it was meant for those Israelites of the Northern Kingdom who lived near Hosea at that time.
- f) Since we established the "who" of the charges, let's now consider what are the charges that are being leveled at the Israelites: The last part of Verse 1 reads, ""There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land."
 - i) To put it simply there aren't any people living in the Northern Kingdom who trust in God even though God's the one who brought their ancestors into that land as to be His witnesses to the world from there.
 - ii) Let me discuss the term translated "no love" for the moment. It's not referring to an ability to love our family as an example. It's about a lack of love for God. It's for us to realize that He created us to have a two-way love relationship with Him. God is showing His love to us by giving us life and providing for us. For example, we get rain to water the ground so food can grow. That's a simple example of how He has created a world we can live in. We express love to Him by acknowledging that He exists, spending time in His word and praying to Him for guidance. We also show His love by sharing our love of Jesus with the people around us. The point is God wants us to have a joy filled life. We get that when we acknowledge His existence and seek Him as a part of our daily life. Anyway, the Israelites "Up North" pretty much walked away from that choice which is why the charge of "No Love" is part of this list.
 - iii) The charge of no faithfulness and no acknowledgement of Him are pretty much a part of any life where there is no love of God in the first place. Anyway, that's the charge being laid out the opening verse. When we live out a life of ignoring God, I will argue the results will be the same, no matter when one lives.
 - iv) That leads to Verse 2 which I'll logically argue follows Verse 1 for a reason:
- 5. Verse 2: There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.
 - a) Verse 2 is pretty much a description of the 2nd "half" of the 10 Commandments. There is an old Jewish and Christian idea that says when one ignores God the results can easily be seen. If we don't believe in an all-powerful God that rules over the world, we easily start cursing, lying, murdering, stealing and committing adultery, because we don't think that we are accountable to Him. If you study the countries that committed the most amount of murder in the 20th Century, the leaders of those places were all people who didn't believe in a God who controls all things and judges us. Someone like a Hitler or a Stalin can only do that level of destruction if they didn't believe they're accountable to a god.
 - b) As horrid a memory as that was in the last 100 years, a smaller version of this occurred in the Northern Israelites Kingdom when Hosea wrote this. They too had collectively turned from the God who not only created them, but who was also responsible for them to be in that land in the first place. Now these sins had grown so rapidly, it's too late to change.
 - c) To use another illustration that I'm fond of using, it's like when one has to go shoot a horse that is injured, as that's the most merciful thing one can do at that point. The sad reality is God has gotten to that point with the Northern Kingdom. That's why in a short time after Hosea wrote this book, that kingdom was literally brought to an end. The Israelites who survived through that massacre were relocated hundreds or thousands of miles away.

6. Verse 3: Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.
- a) If Verse 2 wasn't dark enough, this one guaranteed to depress us. (Kidding).
 - b) This verse brings up a lot of tough questions: How can a land mourn? How can the beasts of the field (think oxen, sheep, etc.), birds and fish die because of this judgment? What did those animals do to deserve this?
 - c) Let me explain the animal suffering first. Imagine a large invading army coming into our land. Imagine it before modern technology. How does a large army eat while they force a city into submission by surrounding it and starving it out? A big part of it is to kill the fish that live in the Sea of Galilee (that was part of the Northern Kingdom) and shot arrows at birds flying overhead. With that in mind, one can see how a land can be robbed of what's naturally going to exist in that land. It's God's way of saying the innocent will suffer when a land is invaded a large invading army. This invading army will eat what is edible.
 - d) Remember why God is saying all of this: Judgment day is coming, because those who are called to be His witnesses to the world have ignored why they were separated as a group in the first place. In effect Verse 3 is the first verse to list some of the consequences when we ignore God in the first place!
 - e) OK, should we fear an invasion if we're not a good witness for Jesus? Show me any place where immorality increases and the vast majority of people turn away from living as God wants us to live and I'll show you a society that's near destruction whether it realizes it or not. Our only hope is God is in the "Miracle Business" and can do what we can't when a nation or a church or a group collectively seeks His will. OK, enough optimism, back to Hosea's and God's complaints against the Israelites living back then:
7. Verse 4: "But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.
- a) My loose translation: "Hey don't think you're any better than the person standing next to you. You're all guilty and you're acting like I'm bringing a charge against a "holy man"".
 - b) Let me explain that a little better. Let's start with a quick discussion of why I don't believe there are any lost tribes of Israel. When Israel first broke into two kingdoms, those people who wanted to worship God moved south, which included the priests. What's implied in that section is the "party animals" moved up north, while those loyal to God moved south. (See 2nd Chronicles Chapter 11.) My point of telling you all of this is because the "North" priests were not priests to God, but most likely priests to Baal. Still when one thinks of a priest, one thinks of somebody who has an upstanding life and draws close to God.
 - i) Therefore as God through Hosea is accusing people of not living as God desires. It is like God's saying to everyone there, "Hey you priests (of Baal), yes I'm taking to you. Don't think this message is for someone else!"
 - ii) OK, now that I've got a lot people feeling guilty, onto the next verse.
8. Verse 5: You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother-- ⁶ my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children. ⁷ The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.
- a) One thing to understand is that Hosea loves "puns". They come out a little here in English, but it's even better in the Hebrew. I say "puns", because Hosea isn't talking about those in the "professional priesthood", but the Israelites in general.
 - b) It may help to understand a little about what Hosea meant by priests. A priest is someone who helps people draw closer to God. In that sense He called the entire Israel nation to be His priests. Yes those who are called in the priesthood are called to a higher standard, but the Israelites in general (both in the North and South) should know enough about Him to have a respect for His laws and live a life, as He desires we do as a witness to Him.

- c) I wanted to open with that discussion of priests before I discuss these verses. The simple point here is that God's accusing those living in the Northern Kingdom that they're dying (spiritually speaking) for a lack of knowledge about Him. There were those in the "North" who claim to be priests, but not the type that God demanded of them or us. The verses are directed at both the Israelites living there as well as those who claim to be "priests". That's the "pun" of Hosea's writing. The pun is a double reference to both all the Israelites living there as well as those who hold the title of being priests. As computer programmers say: "Bad input equals bad output". If you enter bad data (write bad code) you get bad results. If the priests fail to teach the people what God expects of them, then all of them will fail.
 - d) So if all of that is true, shouldn't just the "professional priests" be blamed? Why does God desire to destroy all of them if just the priests are leading them astray? The answer is they should ALL know better. After all, their close enough to the Southern Kingdom to realize how people should be worshipping God. Those living in the Northern Kingdom realized their ancestors were separated from the Egyptians to be God's witness to the world. All I am saying is they have no excuse. That's Hosea's point as well.
 - e) What about little children who died or were taken into captivity due to the destruction as that kingdom ended? I could use the "shooting a horse" analogy again, but I suspect you are getting tired of hearing that one. That's one reason why the bible teaches we all reach an age of accountability and those who die before that age are not held to the standard of those of us who know our bible or should know our bible if we've reached a certain age.
 - f) Bottom line is the Northern Kingdom of Israel had collectively ignored God so much and has grown so wicked because they ignored Him, again, it was time for God to do what He has to do, which is bring that kingdom to an end as it's the most merciful thing He can do at that point. OK you may say. That was 2,700 years ago. I'm a devout Christian and I'm using my life to make a difference for Jesus. The question we all need to realize is just as those Israelites we're part of a "dead country" or a "dead church walking", so God can end our community if we fail to live, as He desires as a witness for Him.
 - g) OK, I've now scared all of us enough from these verses. Time to go on to the next ones!
9. Verse 8: They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness. ⁹ And it will be: Like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.
- a) We're back to the "puns" of priests and people as Hosea's sort of using both terms in an exchangeable way. The idea is to say those who claim they're drawing close to God aren't acting any better than everyone else. To use an extreme example, if theft was common in that society, God's saying the priests are no better than everyone else. Everyone there's at a point where there are no Godly people left and all have turned from Him.
 - b) Think of Hosea giving a "last call". He's saying it's too late for repentance. Let me give it one last chance for anyone to be saved before all of this horrid judgment has to occur. It's a way of saying our world is incurable corrupted by sin, but until God "pulls the plug" on our world as we know it, God's still searching for anyone willing to change their lives and go make a difference for Him despite all that's happening.
 - c) If you say, "Yes, but that's not me. I'm using my life for Jesus." My response is why aren't we doing our best "Hosea impression" and warning people about eternity? I'm not saying we have to give our kids bad names and go purchase unfaithful spouses. I'm saying God's called us like Hosea to reach a lost and dying world about His love. All I'm saying is if we are not part of the solution, then we're part of the problem. To use another classical line, if we are not on the front line firing the bullets (e.g., missionaries), we should be on the back line providing the ammunition (e.g., praying for those on the front line.)
 - d) OK, now the good news. Remember that this "prosecution" speech is designed for people who've made the life long decision to turn from God. I always assume I'm writing lessons to believers. The message for us is never, "I'm saved, who cares about you?" He wants us to use our life in effect to spread this message that judgment is coming, deal with it!

10. Verse 10: "They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves ¹¹ to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding ¹² of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.
- a) Meanwhile, while I was busy giving the "big picture", Hosea's explaining exactly what the specific charges are and the consequences of those charges.
 - b) For example, Verse 10 is saying prostitution will increase, but not the population. To give a modern example, abortion industry spokespeople proudly say that how they encourage the use of contraception, because they know it's not 100% effective. Therefore, they profit from the 1%-2% failure rate. I bring that up here because Hosea's saying, "rampant sex is on the rise, but no new children". So how is that possible? Because Hosea's predicting the great upcoming destruction of the nation due to a lack of respect for God's laws.
 - c) The second example given is drunkenness. The expression "old wine and new" is simply referring to aged wine and newer wine, not "grape juice". The idea is they were spending their time getting drunk and ignoring what God called them to do. I personally know of people who'd rather "go out partying" then ever set foot in a church, and that's the idea of what's being conveyed with that expression.
 - d) Finally we get the expression of "consult wooden idols". Remember in those days, people would make images to represent what they worshipped. If people wanted good weather to grow crops, they'd make an idol of "Baal". If people desired wealth, they'd have things in their home to show that desire. My point has nothing to do with being successful in a lifetime. It is about trusting in things other than God to accomplish a life full of joy.
11. Verse 13: They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.
- a) OK, I admit this isn't getting any easier. The big picture idea is when a society turns from God one's life gets worse and worse. If it's not bad enough people are wasting away their lives "partying all the time" or seeking things other than God or turning to prostitution as a means of getting joy, that's a group of signs that one's society is falling apart. What we're reading here are simply examples of how a society goes from bad to worse once it makes the decision to ignore God's commandments for our lives.
 - b) With that said, let's get into specifics. God commanded the Israelites to worship Him in a specific manner. Among them, some were to be priests and they were to offer sacrifices to God in a specified manner. Yes of course I believe those sacrifices were "temporary" until God Himself could pay for our sins, but I'm getting off topic. The point is each of us have a built in desire to worship something. When we turn from what God calls us to do, then we turn to other things to satisfy that demand. In this case, people went to nearby hills as they felt "closer to God" if they went up to a high place. Just to show their laziness, they'd offer things to their false gods under shady trees. It's the idea of being comfortable as they go what they feel like doing and ignoring God's commands for their lives.
 - c) I can picture people in that society being "shocked" when their daughters then go into the prostitution business. It's the realization by the children that "mom and dad are out doing whatever they feel like in order to be happy, so I'll go try the same thing."
 - d) My point is when we as a society ignore God why are we shocked when our kids follow in our footsteps? That's the scary point of this verse.
12. Verse 14: "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes-- a people without understanding will come to ruin!
- a) The short version is because the whole nation is coming to an end, our daughters won't be suffering for their sins alone, as the whole thing's coming to an end.

- b) God's not saying individuals won't suffer when they turn from Him. He's saying because the whole society is going down, in effect the individual sins won't matter that much!
 - c) Realize this whole chapter is God giving His case why it's too late for them to change. It's a case why judgment is needed, as His people were "broken beyond repair". Again think of this chapter as a plea to any individual among those He's called to turn to God because "the end" is coming. Even if we think it'll never happen to our country or our world, just remember that this life goes by quick. Even if we live over 100 years, that's nothing versus eternity and sooner or later we all must face His judgment. On that tough note, Verse 15.
13. Verse 15: The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow?
- a) One thing you notice about spokespeople for God in the bible is when they are speaking, they like to use illustrations people can relate too. For example, most Israelites farmed at that point in history. Therefore, to use an illustration of an animal that's stubborn because it's hard to move is something most of them can relate too. Most of us have heard the old phrase of being, "Stubborn as a mule". That's the same idea. It's like saying "you're so set in your ways there is nothing I can do to get you to change?"
 - b) That leads to the second sentence in this text. The idea is effectively, "I created you ("us") so that I can lead you down the path that I desire." So what is that path? It's the idea that we take time daily to seek Him through prayer and study of His word as well as spending time with other believers. I'll argue that Christians are free to live however we can as long as we live within the framework of biblical principals. For example, if we don't steal or if we don't commit murder or adultery, those are obvious examples of living as He desires.
 - i) As I've been lecturing since I started this lesson, the Israelites around Hosea got to a point in their life where they did whatever they felt like doing and ignored living as God called them to live as a witness for Him.
 - ii) To paraphrase this verse one more time, "How can I guide you to be a witness for Me when you don't give a hoot about Me in the first place?"
14. Verse 17: Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! ¹⁸ Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. ¹⁹ A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.
- a) As we transition from Chapters 4 to Chapters 5, we finish the "charges" against those who refuse to use their lives as a witness for God and move into the trial's punishment phase.
 - b) Let's start by remembering that "Ephraim" is a nickname for the Israel tribes that made up the Northern Israel Kingdom. Ephraim is the name of the largest tribe in that area, so that is simply a nickname for that kingdom.
 - c) In fact one can see Verses 17 and 18 are not accusations against them, but just statements of facts. It's like a judge saying, "I've heard enough of the evidence. The person on trial is beyond hope, time to commit the sentence." Those two verses are simply examples of why they are "beyond hope". The short version is they've ignored God so long, all they seem to care about is going after false gods, partying all the time and committing sexual sins with whoever they feel like. So am I saying God's against us having a "good time"? Of course not. The prevailing issue is being a living witness for God. If all we did in life was getting drunk or sleeping with who ever we can or worshipping whatever feels right, how are we a witness for God that way? What most people never get is living, as He desires will give us far more joy than if we ignore Him in the first place.
 - d) The sad reality is the Israelites living back then had gotten to the point where they were so stubborn, God's got nothing left to do but pronounce judgment on them. Verse 19 begins that judgment. The expression, "A whirlwind will sweep them away" is a colorful way of telling the Israelites their country is about to come to an end. To say, "Their sacrifices will bring them shame" is a way of saying when they sacrifice to other gods, they'll learn what a waste of time that was as they're about to be destroyed.

- e) OK John, this is a sad reality from 2,700 years ago. What's the point for us? Often we fail to look at people around us as "lost sinners". Even if we dedicate our lives to Jesus as we live for Him, God is sort of reminding us, "It's not just about us". Heaven is large enough that as many who are willing to be saved will be saved. All I'm saying is like the Israelites back then, God's called us to be a living witness for Him. The "marching orders" for them apply to us as well. OK then, enough guilt for Chapter 4, let's try Chapter 5.
15. Chapter 5, Verse 1: "Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you: You have been a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor.
- a) This verse has a whole bunch of "who's" and a few "where's", I'll make this simple:
- i) The "who's" is a colorful way of saying, "Everybody in the Northern Kingdom of Israel: From the king, those who are part of the royal family, those who work as priests in that kingdom and everybody else there while I'm at it."
 - ii) As to the where's, we have two places called Mizpah and Tabor. Don't worry I'm not going to give a geography lesson. Just realize these were two places within the Northern Kingdom that were centers of false God worship.
 - iii) To make this simple and give a flavor of the judgment that's be described here, all we have to realize is that the whole nation was collectively guilty of abandoning a relationship with God and now it's too late.
 - iv) OK John, as you love to say, that was 2,700 years ago and I consider myself to be a pretty devout Christian, how does this affect me? First, it's a reminder that people do exist in this world where God effectively says to them, "It's too late, you're now a walking dead man (or woman) even though you don't realize it." As I also enjoy saying, God doesn't put a big mark on the bodies of who is saved, so we can never tell who is and isn't saved. The point is as we live to be a good witness for Jesus, we need to keep in mind that some people refuse to listen to what we have to say, no matter if it makes sense or not. Just as Hosea here is effectively telling all those living in the "North" that it's too late to get your act together, judgment is coming!
 - v) To use another old cliché, "the proof is in the pudding". The fact that God judged this kingdom soon after Hosea said this is proof that He was serious about being a living witness for Him. Should that scare us? Of course. We need to separate the issue of salvation versus being a good witness for Him. Did believers still exist in the "North" at that time? At the least we had Hosea and his family. I suspect that some people up "North" were eternally saved, but at the same time that nation did experience judgment for failing to be a witness for God. That's the part that should scare you and me: If we as a collective group of Christians (be it a church, a group of believers or a country) fail to live as He desires, He can pronounce judgment on us as easily as He did the Northern Kingdom.
 - vi) Therefore the motto of this verse is "Don't mess with God, the consequences in this lifetime as well as eternity are at stake and He has a limit to His patience with us."
- b) Wow, all that heavy stuff just from Verse 1. Hang tight, we have 14 more verses to go!
16. Verse 2: The rebels are deep in slaughter. I will discipline all of them.
- a) So who the rebels deep in slaughter? I'm pretty sure it refers to the Assyrians who had no mercy as they conquered town after town in that Northern Kingdom.
 - b) Let's try this another way: Do you think it's fair to the little children living there that all of this destruction took place? Do you think it's fair to the few who still believed in God that all this judgment happened? To use another of my favorite illustrations, it's more merciful to kill a wounded horse than to let it keep living in that state.
 - c) OK then, how does God judge believers today that way? I can name you entire ministries that have come to an end because their leaders have turned to some sin or simply ignored preaching God's word. I know of a major church near me that lost most of its members as it turned from teaching His word to other programs. It's a "dead church walking."

- d) All I'm saying is God's discipline occurs all around us whether we realize it or not. While our country may not come to a physical end, we can collectively fail to be His witnesses to the world around us and suffer the consequences. I suspect most of us veteran Christians have witnessed lives become ruined when a person or a group has turned from what God has desired of their lives or seen a ministry come to an end when people fail to live as God desires we live.
- i) What about false preachers? Why are they allowed to flourish? It's because people are built with a need to worship something and when they choose to ignore Him, they find substitutes that are all over the place. Just as those Israelites living back then turned to Baal worship, there's plenty of alternative choices to God that exist today as well as back then.
- ii) OK, enough of my condemnation, time for Hosea to dish it out some more!
17. Verse 3: I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt. ⁴ "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.
- a) If one studies the bible, one learns a lot of things about God. The only assumption that we must make about God is that He is perfect and knows all things. The classic question is "If God is perfect, why does He allow evil to exist?" We forget that even atheists must explain evil as well. The existence of evil proves there's more to this life than what we can see. He allows it if for no other reason than for us to seek Him to help deal with the consequences of living in a fallen world. All I'm saying is God is perfect by definition and He is aware of all things.
- b) Which surprisingly, leads me back to these verses. God is saying through Hosea that He's aware of all things. He can see the big picture of how a society is acting as well as see the actions of us as individuals. As I learned a long time ago, "Every time I think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache". David Hocking.
- c) With that said, let me discuss prostitution as it's mentioned several times in these verses. It is not so much referring to literal prostitution although I'm positive there was some of it as people chose to live however they wanted and ignored God's desire for their lives. The idea of prostitution is another "pun" about turning from God.
- i) In the bible believers turning to false gods and committing adultery are synonyms. Think of it this way: In both adultery and idolatry, we are turning away from that commitment we have made in life. Therefore when Hosea condemns the Northern Israelite Kingdom of collective prostitution, the issue isn't just sex with any person we feel like, as much as it is a colorful way of saying we're ignoring the life that we have committed to: That is God designed us with a need to worship Him and use our lives as a witness for Him. When we turn from that commitment, it's as if we are prostituting ourselves whether we realize it or not.
- d) Anyway, these verses give more of the it's too late, as your corrupt beyond repair, flavor to them. Again the issue isn't individual salvation, it's about whether or not we're living as God desires we live as a witness for Him.
- e) OK time for some more guilt for us Christians. Is Hosea saying we're not doing enough to be a witness for God? Does He expect us to be passing out Christian brochures or another equivalent every moment of the day? Exhale. No. Of course we all have a life to live and we have "chores" to get done. The question is always, "If we were arrested for the crime of being a Christian, is there enough evidence to convict us?" That's what God's asking us as we go through our lives.
- f) With that said, time to get back to the evidence of conviction. Keep the big picture in mind here: When people are judged before God and be sent to hell, He wants us to realize why we are convicted of sin. Hosea's using this section to explain why many who'll claim to be believers will be sent to hell. That's what this section is all about.

18. Verse 5: Israel's arrogance testifies against them; the Israelites, even Ephraim, stumble in their sin; Judah also stumbles with them.
- a) To paraphrase Verse 5, "Hey all of you living in the Southern Kingdom, don't think I'm just speaking to your cousins up North, you're in trouble too!"
 - b) A reason why Hosea refers to the Northern Kingdom as "Ephraim", is because the name of the Northern Kingdom was "Israel". The Southern one was called Judah. My point is it can be confusing as sometimes in the bible, the word "Israel" can just refer to the Northern Kingdom and sometimes it refers to all Israelites. That's why this verse makes a reference to both the "North" and the "South" here.
 - c) A quick history lesson might help here. The Southern Kingdom of Judah lasted roughly another hundred years. God's effectively saying, "The collective sins in the South are not as bad as up North, but they're not far behind. I (God) am hoping that the residents of the South take notice of what's about to occur up North. Hopefully that event will draw some to a close relationship to Me because of that destruction." Like any miracle, it's only good for a short time because people then expect the next miracle in order to keep on believing.
 - i) To quote Jesus, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." Luke 16:31, NKJV
 - ii) Bottom line, the North has collectively turned from God. Those living in the South aren't far behind them. Therefore, condemnation is coming.
19. Verse 6: When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, they will not find him; he has withdrawn himself from them.
- a) First the important issue: Is there a time in our lives when it's too late to seek God? Sure. None of us know when it's too late for anyone, but such a time exists and only God knows when that time exists. My favorite quote on this topic is, "Don't go down that road, don't you know the road is greased and it's hard to turn around". Roughly based on something I heard a pastor named Bob Davis say. All I'm saying is when we start to go down a path in life where one turns from God, judgment comes. It will literally come at death, but we also have to realize that some people have literally gone down that "greased road" as it is literally too late for them. Do we ever know when someone hits that point? Of course not. It's for us to realize no matter how hard we try, some refuse to change their lifestyles.
 - b) OK, what's the deal with bringing their flocks to seek God? This is about animal sacrifice. Some scholars argue those living up North were still going through the rituals of animal sacrifices to God, but their hearts were not in it. It's like trying to cover all one's bases by offering sacrifices to God and other deities at the same time. One can imagine how hard the Israelites up there must have prayed to God when the armies surrounded their cities.
 - c) Remember from Chapters 1-3 how Hosea named his third child, "Not my people". It was a way of saying there is a time when it's too late to collectively seek God as judgment has been pronounced. By the way, if the story of God's relationship with Israel as a nation did end this way, it would truly be a sad story. There's more to it, which is why we're only on Chapter 6 of a 15-chapter book. OK enough optimism, back to His judgment.
20. Verse 7: They are unfaithful to the LORD; they give birth to illegitimate children. Now their New Moon festivals will devour them and their fields.
- a) One of the most valuable lessons I learned about religion when I visited a Greek Orthodox Church. I listened to the priest give a lecture on their church history. During a Q&A time, I got the impression that the priests attitude toward non-Greeks were, "Are you a Catholic or an Evangelical Christian, then may God bless you and guide your life." However, there was a woman in the audience with a Greek background. She stated how she's going to a non-Greek church. The priest got on her case for daring to not go to a Greek one!
 - b) My point isn't to condemn the Greek Church. It's about efforts made to preserve culture in a society. I've got Jewish friends who feel the same way. If a non-Jewish person becomes a devout Christian, good for you. However, for Jewish people to be Christians is a "sin".

- c) I give that little lecture only to help us understand how strong cultural ties can be. I'd say that God has the same "attitude" in the sense that those who are called to be His witnesses to the world, we're His witnesses, period. When the text says the Israelites are having kids outside of their traditional marriage, I don't know if it's literal, or just referring to those in that culture who turn from God. I can see from His perspective, He sees them as Israelites who've abandoned Him for other deities. That makes more sense. (Before I move on, I do tell my Jewish friends that God still wants them to keep their Jewish culture. The point is to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Hopefully that goes without saying.)
 - d) The "New Moon" festivals are an example of how the Israelites have turned from how He expects them to live. The Hebrew calendar is based on a lunar cycle. A significant day for them was every new (no) moon as a time to gather. In 1st Samuel, King Saul was mad that David wasn't at his seat when they gathered for that monthly ritual. See 1st Samuel 20:18.
 - e) What was occurring here was the Israelites were using that monthly gathering to worship other gods (i.e., Baal) during that holiday. Anyway, one of the reasons the Israelites were about to suffer a horrible judgment is simply because they refused to live as God is calling them to live. (Hint! Hint!)
21. Verse 8: "Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth Aven; lead on, O Benjamin. ⁹ Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning. Among the tribes of Israel I proclaim what is certain.
- a) I've got a bit of good news here, don't worry too much about the locations here. When it says to "sound the trumpet in Gibeah and the horn in Ramah", it'd be like in "American" to say, "From Maine to California". In other words, God's saying let it be known from one end of the land to the other, let this be known!
 - b) OK we'll bite. Let what be known? That judgment has come on the Northern Kingdom. This is God's way of saying the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim as a nickname) is about to receive it's judgment because they are "beyond hope" at this point.
 - c) You have to realize a big attitude in the Northern Kingdom was, "We're God's people, He can't destroy this place, because we are who we are!" Hosea's speaking for God in these 2 chapters as He lays out how those who are called to be believers can suffer when we fail to live as God calls us to live. That's the key point of this lesson.
 - d) What's "lead on, O Benjamin". Short version is the tribe of Benjamin is part of the Southern Kingdom. It's God's way of saying those in Benjamin somehow were guilty as well.
22. Verse 10: Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.
- a) Speaking of the Southern Kingdom, we get another reference to it in Verse 10. Because the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, let's just say they had constant boundary battles. One side could easily be guilty of moving boundary markers in order to get more territory for their side. If the Assyrians were going to attack and destroy the "North" a city at a time, it'd be tempting for the "South" to move their boundary makers. To state what's obvious here, is that God wants us to respect each other's boundaries. Moving markers of boundaries is the equivalent of stealing.
 - b) The point here is God's telling those in the Southern Kingdom, "My judgment's is about to start up North. Therefore you in the "South" better take head and learn from this. Further all of you in the "South" better not take try to take advantage of their problems or you will also suffer the same threat as them."
 - c) Speaking of suffering judgment, let's look at the next two verses:
23. Verse 11: Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment, intent on pursuing idols. ¹² I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah.
- a) My loose translation: "Those up north have turned against me so bad, they're now beyond hope and it's judgment time." Just as a moth destroys clothing a little at a time, so God is going to destroy the Northern Kingdom probably one city at a time.

- b) The last part of Verse 11 says, "like rot to the people of Judah". That's a hint that the South will be judged soon too. Just as wood boards rot over time, so the Southern Kingdom is a place on "borrowed time". The point line here is about 100 years after the North Kingdom ends, the Southern one will end too. I believe I've beaten that point to death by now.
 - c) The point for you and me is when we choose to ignore God, we may not see a "big bolt of lightning" as God's judgment comes quickly, however, our life may rot away to nothing when we choose to ignore His will for our lives. That's the warning here.
24. Verse 13: "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores.
- a) Apparently the Northern Kingdom made a collective plea to the Assyrians to save their kingdom from ending. Scholars debate over who that king was. The point is the people "Up North" (as I like to call them), didn't seek God for help, but tried appealing to those people (the Assyrians) who wanted to kill them. To put it simply, it didn't work.
 - b) Time for a quick reminder on help from others, "Seek God as if we have no other options and then seek all the help we can get to remedy our situations." Yes the Israelites had to deal with this enemy at their doorsteps. All I'm saying is in tough situations, "If we go to our knees first" and ask His guidance, then we're free to make the best decisions we can in the framework of God's rules for our lives and deal with the problems at hand. The great mistake the Israelites made was failing to seek God for their problems but just trying to go deal with it without His help. That was the great mistake made here.
 - c) OK, now that we know that plan was a failure, what's next? Verse 14:
25. Verse 14: For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.
- a) Here's the heavy judgment being described in one colorful verse. Just as a powerful lion can kill just about anything it attacks, so God will be like a powerful lion as He carries out His destruction plan for the two kingdoms.
 - b) Some translations say "young lion" for Judah. The point is Judah's (Southern Kingdom) destruction is coming later. "Great lion" implies that God's judgment will be so strong as to destroy the Southern Kingdom where the descendants of David rule and the temple is going to be destroyed.
 - c) Bottom line, "Bad news all around", no getting around it.
 - d) I have to admit that if Hosea's book ended here, it's a very sad story indeed. Let's face it, God could easily say, "I've had enough of all of you. You've failed to live as I have called you to live so here are the consequences." The good news is Hosea doesn't end that way. God can't go back on an unconditional promise to give that land to them. Therefore, this story can't end on that bad note. Which leads perfectly to Verse 15:
26. Verse 15: Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."
- a) One thing to grasp about understanding bible predictions is that they work in "patterns". For example, about a hundred years after the Southern Kingdom was destroyed, Israelites were allowed to return to that land, but under the domain of another empire. Israel exists today as an independent country after 2,700 years. My simple point is that despite the fact Israel was destroyed as a nation after Hosea preached all of this, it wasn't the final end of that nation. God still has plans for Israel as a unique group of people. They're still God's chosen people, so we have to deal with that. Bottom line is God's saying once they have admitted their guilt and sought God in repentance, He will still work through them again!
 - b) Speaking of bible predictions working in patterns, consider this verse another way: Some scholars argue that Jesus can't return until the Israelites "collectively" admit their mistake and seek Him that way. It's an argument that a key condition upon the return of Jesus is if and when the nation of Israel collectively seeks Jesus as God. It's a theory, and I'll leave it at that. My view is Jesus comes when He does and we can't change that time frame

27. OK, I admit, this was a hard lesson to get through. Nobody is crazy about having to hear about judgment especially if it's about us. This was a tough but necessary lesson in order to live as God wants us to live. The good news is Hosea doesn't end this way. Therefore, I'll express gratitude in my closing prayer that we don't have to suffer that same judgment. Let me begin:
28. Heavenly Father, first we thank you that we've only been saved because we believe Jesus is both God and in charge of our lives. We can't earn it. However, we do understand that you expect us to be a witness for You. As we read about these harsh penalties for turning from You, help us to stay close to You and seek You diligently so that our lives can make a difference for You. Give us the wisdom to make the tough decisions we have to make in life, and may our lives glorify You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.