

## Hosea 6-8 – John Karmelich

1. What would we do if we were publicly called out for some sin we were guilty of? Would we just say, "Yes I'm guilty, but that's the way I am, so accept it." Why do we have to strive to be a better person? If we are suffering the consequences for our actions, why change now? If we realize we are struggling with something, why can't we just say, that's just the way I am? Why can't we just say we are doing the best I can, so leave me alone!? What I'm getting at is the question of why are we striving to live as God desires? Those are the underlying questions of this section of Hosea.
  - a) Let me put these questions in context of what we've been studying in Hosea so far. He has spent the last two chapters condemning the Israelite's sins and explaining why God has to execute justice against them. So is that it? The Israelites have collectively ignored God for a long time and will now suffer horribly. The issue isn't God's judging them, it's knowing why His judgment is necessary for believers as well as nonbelievers.
  - b) The reason we study this is not to say, "Good for them they turned from how they should be living, I hope God makes them suffer terribly." When we come to one of those times in our life, where we realize, we're incapable of fixing our own issues and we can't get better just by trying harder, that's when we realize we have unlimited access to a power greater than ourselves who wants to help us through whatever we're facing at this moment.
  - c) I realize I'm preaching like I'm at an "AA" meeting, but that is what Hosea's doing here as well. He's trying to communicate to his fellow countrymen that despite the judgment we are about to get for our sins, it's not "The End". As long as we're breathing, there is always time to change and by His power, live as He desires we live. As I love to state, the reason we're to live as God desires isn't to earn His love, it's because if we're saved, He expects us to live a life differently from nonbelievers as to be a witness for Him.
  - d) OK, what if I'm not convicted of any sin at this moment in my life? What if all is well with everyone around me? Why should I read the rest of this lesson? My answer is because we know none of us are perfect and we must face our own issues or shortcomings in order to be the type of person that God wants us to be. I'm very aware that some people are more interested in self-improvement than others. Many read self help books as to say, I need to be more like this or that. What God desires of us is that we study His word, spend a little time thinking about the stories and realize, it's not just about them, but it's about how it is God desires we live! That's why I'm regularly encouraging all of us with myself at the top of the list, to keep seeking God through His word and getting together with believers on a regular basis. The issue is about encouraging each other, be accountable to each other and more importantly working as a team to draw closer to each Him. That is why God desires we gather regularly as believers, not because He needs to hear us praise Him. He desires we work as a team to draw close to Him so together we can use our life for His glory.
2. With that speech out of my system, time for a few specifics about these chapters.
  - a) In order to explain these chapters, I need to talk first about Hosea's writing style. I should start by saying the bible is written by about 40 different authors. Each has their own style of writing and God uses their writing style to communicate what He wants to say to us. I start with that because a number of bible writers argue like an attorney. It's like when the bible says, "God did this and that for us now here is how we should respond." Paul writes with that style. Some authors have more of a "widening circle" style, where they return to the same points over and over again in "widening circles" to add more points. "First John" in The New Testament reads that way as does Hosea. My point is Hosea doesn't just say, "God's done condemning you, now here's the epilogue of what'll happen to us or what is it we should do next". It's more of a here's what's going to happen in the future to people mixed in with more reasons why this is necessary. My simple point is don't expect Hosea to have a nice clean style of "Here's the final outcome of all of this".

- b) Now that we understand that Hosea writes in a widening-circle style, what are the issues he discusses in these chapters?
- i) These chapters read like a mixture of "what more could I (God) have done for you" type of plea in order to get the Israelites to change from worshipping other things. Hosea describes in "ever widening circles" how the Israelites have abandoned who they were called to serve, mixed with the fact that God will bless if and when they return to Him, with some promises to bless them in the future, because God can't go back on His unconditional promise to give them that land.
  - ii) Believe it or not, that leads me perfectly to my lesson title, "God's dilemma". What that means is God has a problem: He made an unconditional promise to Abraham that He would give the land of Israel to the Israelites. The underlying question of this lesson is how does God balance that promise with disobedience to Him?
  - iii) If we start thinking, "That's God's problem or that's the Israelites problem", we are missing the point of why we study God's word in the first place: Because just like the Israelites, God's called us Christians to be a living witness for Him.
  - iv) All I'm saying is that if God gave us Christians the unconditional promise that He will be with us forever, and then we turn and ignore Him, He has a dilemma with us as well. How does God get us to live like we're supposed to live? How does He motivate us to be the type of witness He wants us to be? That's the issue Hosea is describing in these chapters. It's a mixture of condemnation for how the Israelites have messed up to date, mixed with some promises of blessings only because God can't stop loving who He's separated to love in the first place.
  - v) Therefore, these short chapters continue Hosea's "every expanding circle" to tell us why God's "ticked off" and at the same time give us hope that despite that fact, He still wants to bless our lives if we turn to Him.
- c) OK you may say, that's not me. I'm using my life to make a difference for Him. I attend a local church and I do things to make a difference for Him. Why should I feel guilty if "I'm not on the nasty list"? Why should I care that God's angry at the people He's called to be a witness for Him because they're not living as He desires? Because life isn't just about us, it is about reaching the unsaved. What I'm saying is we should never go into an "I'm saved your not, so too bad for you" mode of thinking. If you're currently living as He desires we live and there's nothing to work on for the moment, two things: 1) Ask your spouse about issues to work on (that'll do the trick for all of us) or a friend if your single 2) Be willing to use our imperfect life as a witness for others.
- i) In other words, God never says to us, "Go be perfect, then you can be a witness for Me to the world". Instead, God takes us faults and all, spend the rest of our lives to work on us to draw us closer to Him by modifying our behavior. In the meantime, He still wants each of us to work to be a witness for Him. That's a key point Hosea is trying to communicate in these chapters: God's dilemma of dealing with all our disobedience versus His unconditional promises to bless us become obvious as we go through this text of these chapters.
  - ii) Bottom line, Hosea's "downer" of what they're doing wrong mixed in with how He desires we live is a tough message we need to hear as well as the Israelites who are the original recipients of this letter.
  - iii) Bottom line #2: I ask that you join me as I go verse by verse through this text as to see whether the "shoe fits" our lives as well as the Israelites way back then.
3. Chapter 6, Verse 1: Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.
- a) To explain Verse 1, recall that the last two chapters were a speech by Hosea, as he told the Israelites how God had condemned them, and punishment is coming. The point here is to realize this is not a "wrap-up" for the Israelites in God's collective dealings with them.

- b) Again, we're back to the issue of God's dilemma: The Northern Israel Kingdom have now ignored God for so many years that judgment is coming down hard. For the sake of those who just joined this study, Israel at this time was divided into two kingdoms, that I like to call the North and the South to keep it simple. Anyway Hosea lived in the North and now for many generations most people living in the North had ignored God. Does this mean I can ignore God because it takes "generations" for punishment to occur? Hardly. First we are all judged individually based on how we've lived with the knowledge He's given us of His existence, and what we've done with that knowledge. One has to separate individual judgment from group judgment. As an obvious example, if a pastor or priest or a ministry fails to be what God wants them to be, God can bring that ministry to an end. I suspect we can all name some famous minister who's career was ruined when he failed to live as God had called them to live.
    - i) My point is God's dilemma is "What do I do with the people I've promised to bless unconditionally, with the fact they're ignoring Me?" That's the issue here.
  - c) That little lecture leads me perfectly back to Verse 1. Hosea's saying, despite all the horrid things God promised to do to the two Israelite kingdoms that existed back then, it's never too late to turn back to God. To put it simply, "All of the bad stuff that's about to occur in the land of Israel isn't "The End" just a temporary end because the most merciful thing I as God can do is end this existence where I'm being collectively ignored by My people.
  - d) My point is God solves His dilemma by saying, "It's not over". That's why Israel can brag as being the only people in the history of the world to ever be kicked out their country, be scattered and come back to be a nation again. They did it twice in history, and there is no other group in history that ever pulled that off. As the old saying goes, if you want proof that the bible is the word of God, look at the history of Israel for that evidence!
  - e) Speaking of the Israelites back then, let's move on to Verse 2:
4. Verse 2: After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.
- a) There are very few places in the Old Testament where the Gospel message is given in any sort of blatant manner. I'm reminded of a term used in radio communication called hostile jamming. For example, if you want to broadcast a message on radio frequency "600", if an enemy wanted to prevent that broadcast, they can broadcast on the same frequency with a much more powerful signal. During the two world wars, radio messages were spread out across a wide range of frequencies in order to prevent hostile jamming.
  - b) My point is the bible does the same thing. You could take out a chapter or a book and it'd still broadcast the same message, only not as clear.
  - c) I bring that up here, because we get a subtle reference to the "cross" here in Verse 2. Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 15:4 that Jesus rose on the third day according to the Scriptures, I would argue Paul had this verse here in Hosea in mind when he wrote that.
  - d) Let me put this another way: Did God revive the Northern Kingdom after two days? No. Did the residents of the Southern Kingdom come back into that land two literal days after they were destroyed? Of course not. I've read commentaries on this verse, that imply the idea that Hosea wasn't predicting the "cross" here, just that the Israelites would be injured by God's punishment and recover after two days. Historically speaking, the "North" came to an end about twenty years after this was written. The "South" came to an end about a hundred years after this was written. We can't get any literal two day meaning out of this verse, so it must be some sort of future prediction. That's why most Christians do see this verse the same way Paul did, as being a prediction about Jesus death and resurrection.
  - e) OK then, how does that fit into Israel's history and God's dilemma? It's the idea that those who trust in God Himself paying for our sins, will be forever in His presence despite all of the bad things that are about to occur in the land of Israel. It's the realization that this isn't "The End", God still has an eternal plan to be with those who trust in Him with their lives.

5. Verse 3: Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."
- a) One of the most common arguments that atheists make is, where is the evidence that God does exist? We can see the sun rising or rain coming down from the sky, but how does it prove His existence? Why can't we just say all of that occurs by random chance? Where's the evidence of His existence? Hosea's answer effectively is, "Just as these events do occur God will appear in our lives so deal with it." Let me explain.
    - i) No, it does not mean God appears to each of us in visible form in our lifetime.
    - ii) It does mean that there is more to life than what we can see or observe.
    - iii) Even atheists must admit that if God does not exist, then our world ultimately has no purpose.
    - iv) The idea behind this verse is to consider such big concepts as the way stars rotate around each other and planets rotate around the sun. Can all of that happen just by random chance? Living in an "eco-system" where clouds form and then move to give us rain is some random luck event? Those who study the DNA molecule can tell you the mathematical odds of that molecule occurring by random chance are beyond any mathematical possibility of ever occurring. All I'm saying is the evidence that God is a part of our world is all around us if we just look for it.
  - b) OK John, you're preaching to a bunch of believing Christians here. My point is just as sure as the fact that Jesus did walk the earth time about 2,000 years ago, I'm equally convinced He will walk the earth again. That's Hosea's point. Just as the evidence of God existing is all around us, so we can be sure that we'll all face God's judgment one day. Therefore, it's better to approach Him as being fully forgiven than to question His existence at all.
  - c) So why is Hosea preaching to us about God's existence anyway? In the early chapters, he gave prophetic names to his children about God's judgment coming. The last few chapters were about God's judgment coming soon. Therefore this little speech here is to encourage people to realize that despite our sins, God's still going to appear to judge us, so we better accept His existence and turn from what displeases Him. That's the point.
6. Verse 4: "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.
- a) As my regular's know, "Ephraim" was the name of the largest of the 12 tribes of Israel in the Northern Kingdom. Judah is the largest of the 12 tribes in the Southern one. All I'm saying is Hosea's using nicknames for the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as if to say, "I'm speaking to all people who I've called to be a witness for Me". Of course, that applies to us Christians which is why we study Hosea in the first place.
  - b) Now that we know the "who", let's study the "what". Hosea's calling their collective love for God as being like something that disappears fairly quickly like early morning dew.
    - i) That requires more of an explanation. Most Israelites at that time claim to believe in God. They did all the required rituals, but essentially their hearts were not in it. It'd be like thinking, "I went to church today, so I can cross that off of my list of things to do, so now I can go do whatever I feel like doing!"
    - ii) God doesn't want our relationship with Him to be some ritual we do say once per week to cross it off our list. He expects us to live based on a moment-by-moment trust in Him all the time!
    - iii) I'm reminded of the old expression, "Many people miss heaven by 18 inches" All that means is many people have the "head knowledge" of what God demands of us, but our hearts are not "in it". The 18 inches is the distance from our heads to our hearts, and many people don't pour their hearts into their relationships with God and suffer eternally for it. That's the condemnation of these verses. All this means for believers is to ask ourselves, is "this" what God wants of us now?

7. Verse 5: Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.
- My loose translation, "I (God) have picked people to condemn your lifestyle choices with the words I told them to speak". That is what Hosea is saying in a colorful way.
  - Here's a question to ponder, why doesn't God speak Himself? If God is God, can't He say what He wants when He wants to whoever He wants? Why does He want prophets to be His spokesmen? I suppose for starters, people would doubt it's God speaking even if they heard a loud booming, verifiable voice. The answer is it would scare most people if they'd heard God's voice. There's a story in Exodus of many hearing God speak directly, and to put it simply, the people effectively said, "Moses you talk to God, we can't handle this." (It is from Exodus 20:19). My point is God uses prophets because it's too frightening to most people to have God speak to us directly.
  - Bottom line, God's had prophets like Hosea say that God's chosen are in big trouble. As to prove that God's not to be messed with, destruction came soon after those messages were given by the prophets, as both Israelite kingdoms soon came to an end. Now if that won't scare us into reading our bible carefully, I don't know what will!
8. Verse 6: For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.
- Bottom line time: Since God's obviously trying to get our attention, what exactly does He want of us? Verse 6 is the answer: It begins with a healthy fear that God exists and we're to live as He desires. Then He expects us to show kindness to others as He has to us. Let me give a simple example. There's someone close to me, who I'm currently having issues with. What I have to remind myself regularly is that God's unconditionally forgiven all of my sins, so therefore I should have the same attitude with others. That's a simple example of showing God's mercy.
  - Let me try a tougher one? What if someone has seriously hurt us in some way? God has not called us to be judge and jury. We forgive so they are no longer hurting us. We may go to authorities for justice, but forgiveness is not about letting criminals go free, it's about letting go of the pain (a slow and difficult process) so they are no longer hurting us.
  - Anyway, God's saying since He has a lot of mercy on us as He doesn't strike people dead the first moment they sin, so we should have mercy on others. The most popular verse in the Old Testament to religious Jews is called the "Shema". The short version is to love God with all we've got and love others as ourselves. In effect, that's what Verse 6 is saying.
9. Verse 7: Like Adam, they have broken the covenant-- they were unfaithful to me there.
- There are many so called bible scholars who claim that Adam and Eve were not real, but those early chapters of the bible were made up stories. It is interesting that Hosea thinks of Adam as being literal. Paul considered Adam to be a real person. So did Luke when he listed Jesus genealogy all the way back to Adam in Luke Chapter 3.
  - OK, that was a little off topic. The point here is God made a deal with Adam and Eve. It seems like a strange thing, "Do what you want, but don't eat of this particular tree." God was establishing that ever since the beginning God has rules He expects us to live by. To break those rules means consequences. Hosea's point here is Adam and Eve had to suffer the consequences when they broke God's rules and the Israelites also suffered as they too disobeyed His commandments. Does that mean Christians go to hell if we sin enough? I will argue it just means we can be "taken out of the ballgame" or suffer some other way if we fail to live as a witness for God! That alone should scare us to do what's right!
10. Verse 8: Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood. <sup>9</sup> As marauders lie in ambush for a man, so do bands of priests; they murder on the road to Shechem, committing shameful crimes.
- Hosea's saying, "You want specific examples of how we've turned against God? Let me remind you of people in a city in "North" Israel (town of Shechem) and what they did.

- b) I have to admit, I'm one of those people who think, "A few minutes from now, I won't be able to recall the name of this city or the crimes committed there." What's important for us to get is that God's aware of crimes that occur in our society, and if we don't stand up for what's right, the situation will get worse and the whole society will suffer.
  - c) What Hosea's implying here is people are getting away with murder here. All of us will suffer because if we let sin go unchecked, it just spreads and gets worse. Most of us have lived long enough to know that if we don't nip a problem in the bud early, it spreads to a point where it can be unstoppable.
11. Verse 10: I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. There Ephraim is given to prostitution and Israel is defiled.
- a) Need another example? A little history would be helpful here. In the practice of worship of Baal, there would be temples dedicated to him. Prostitution was part of that ritual as a way of "turning on" Baal. Customers would pay for sex to pay the bills. All I'm saying is God's well aware of a group or nation that's collectively turned from Him and everyone is going to have to suffer the consequences.
  - b) Let me put this another way: Suppose you say, "I'm a devout Christian and I'm living as I am supposed to. Why should I suffer just because my country is going to pot? First, let's separate individual salvation from group punishment. We may have to suffer as we are a part of a society that turns from how God expects us to live. We may be saved, but it will not affect God's condemnation of sin. A reason God calls us to live differently is to show that there's a way to live that is pleasing to God and we can experience far more joy living that way than we can by trying to get "all the sin we can" in this lifetime. Still, if a society is essentially saying, "Let everyone live however they want as long as they're not hurting anyone, why can't we leave them alone?" The response is they don't realize how they are hurting themselves when they turn to a prostitution lifestyle as an obvious example.
  - c) OK, enough condemnation of the "North", time to move "South" for one verse.
12. Verse 11a: "Also for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed.
- a) The short version here is that God's judgment on the "North" will spare the "South" for a while longer. For those of you who were not with me when I went through all of Isaiah, a point came when the Assyrian army (that killed the "North") was wiped out one night by one angel when that army surrounded Jerusalem. (See Isaiah 37:36). The simple point is God's sparing the Southern Kingdom for the time being.
  - b) One can also see this verse another way: The "harvest" is a hint of all the people who will accept Jesus, a descendant of the tribe of Judah as the Messiah. That's a "harvest" well into the millions or billions and still counting.
13. Verse 11b: "Whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people,<sup>1</sup> whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria revealed. They practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets;<sup>2</sup> but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before me.<sup>3</sup> "They delight the king with their wickedness, the princes with their lies.<sup>4</sup> They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises.
- a) Some translations see the last part of Verse 11 tying directly into the first few verses of the 7th Chapter. Some see it as a separate issue. I'll explain it both ways quickly.
  - b) One can translate the last line of Verse 11 as saying, "When I restore the fortunes of all of My chosen people that's when I'm going to bless Judah". As I put it, when multitudes of people accept Jesus as a descendant of Judah, that's when the "fortunes will be restored".
  - c) The counterargument is Hosea's saying at the time when God does this great act of paying for everyone's sins, life among the Israelites will still go on, as when Hosea first wrote this letter. To explain this concept another way, text is saying the sins being committed in the Northern Kingdom ("Samaria" was the capital) are so bad, that place is beyond repair. It's a message of "it's too late to save them and here's why!"

- d) A little more history may be helpful here. After the Israelites came back to that land, after another empire came on the scene, the Israelites returned back in their homeland. It didn't stop the historical rivalry between the "North and the South". The Southern part of Israel included the city of Jerusalem and they were considered loyal to God. The Samaritan area of Israel was considered a land of "half-breeds" as Judaism mixed with other religions.
    - i) That's why it was such an insult in Jesus' time to be called a Samaritan there.
    - ii) The reason I give that history lesson is to realize that the corruption that the North had, killed their reputation for centuries. God's essentially saying, "You're corrupt beyond hope and the most merciful thing I can do is kill you at this point."
  - e) Remember my opening remarks about being correct ousted (called out) for some crime or sin we're committed? That's what these opening verses of Chapter 7 do. They're scolding the Israelites by saying, "I (God) know what you're doing. Don't think that you're getting away with anything! God's calling those Israelites a bunch of liars, thieves, adulterers and a few other choice comments.
    - i) Picture people who go through life ignoring the God who created them in the first place. It's like if you have a teenage son or daughter consider what you're telling them and they respond with "Whatever". I sort of see God looking down upon us as we tell Him "Whatever" when we go through our lives as if He's meaningless.
    - ii) That's how I picture the Israelites acting and the evidence of their lives support it.
  - f) With that said, let me take a quick break from condemning all of us during the moments in our lives when we're ignoring the God who created us, to explain the last verse. There is a strange reference to a baker keeping his oven hot. So you know, all that is referring to is the idea that we are so "bent" on doing our desire and not His, it's like we're on "fire" to do our own thing as if God doesn't exist.
  - g) Bottom line, the country was turning against God despite the fact they were separated in order to be witness for Him and now it's judgment time. OK then, back to Chapter 7.
14. Chapter 7, Verse 5: On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine, and he joins hands with the mockers. <sup>6</sup> Their hearts are like an oven; they approach him with intrigue. Their passion smolders all night; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.
- a) Hosea, speaking for God is still giving examples of why God's judgment is coming down hard and soon. The "day of the festival of the king" may refer to his birthday or possibly the anniversary of the start of his reign. The point has nothing to do with having any sort of celebration over a major milestone. The point is nobody's giving God any credit. I'd be like realizing, "I've now lived "x" years or I've now accomplished this milestone, but we're giving ourselves all the credit and not God for guiding us that far.
  - b) Anyway, the condemnation is against the leaders of Israel for letting their passions for all of their desires "run amok", and not realizing it's God who allowed them to be there in the first place. A little history might help here. During the final century or so of the Northern Kingdom's existence, they had a lot of different kings. If my memory is correct, four of the last six kings of the Northern Kingdom were assassinated. My point is the evidence of the downfall of the Northern Kingdom was obvious based on all the power changes. As we're reading in these verses of all this corruption within the king's palace, know that it lines up well with what we know of historical facts about their history.
  - c) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. Why should we care? Remember my lesson title is "God's dilemma". The issue is if we're saved by His grace alone and we can't lose it how does that affect our behavior? All I'm saying is God expects us to use that free gift of salvation to be a witness for Him and not waste the time He gives us.
  - d) If you haven't noticed by now, Hosea likes using hot ovens as an illustration of how those who should be His people are acting in this chapter. It'd be like saying one is so hot to do what's wrong, we are getting out of control like an overheated oven. The point is they're getting out of control and Hosea's using a hot oven to illustrate that point.

15. Speaking of comparing bad behavior to hot ovens, Verse 7: All of them are hot as an oven; they devour their rulers. All their kings fall, and none of them calls on me. <sup>8</sup> "Ephraim mixes with the nations; Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over.
- a) There's a fun fact to share from this text. Most of us know that in order to cook a pancake, it has to be flipped. If it isn't, it can literally be cooked well on one side and still be raw on the other. That's the underlying word picture in Verse 7. It does not come out that way in the English, but in the original Hebrew, it implies someone is "Half-baked" which refers to a person who doesn't have it all together in life. It's a cute word picture and the origin of that concept.
  - b) All I'm saying is God through Hosea is condemning people who claim to be God's chosen people but don't live like it. The issue's not being perfect. The issue is about "putting our time and our money where our mouth is". Coming back to the oven illustration, it'd be as if we have the "hot's" for things that don't matter eternally, but don't have the same "hot's" for God. It'd be like saying, "I can tell you really like that "thing" very much as you love to talk about it, but I wish you have the same desire for God that you do for that other thing that you are so passionate about.
  - c) This reminds me of how Jesus condemned a specific church in the book of Revelation. He effectively said, "I wish you were either on fire for Me, or completely turned off by Me. In either case, I Jesus can work in those types of lives. But because you act lukewarm in your relationship with Me, I can't use you." (My very loose translation of Revelation 3:16.)
    - i) The point is the Israelites were lukewarm in their relationship with God. I'm sure they went through the "motions" of seeking God, but their hearts were not in it. It is like the lukewarm illustration that Jesus uses to describe those who will not put their time and money where they claim their hearts are!
  - d) In the history of the Northern Kingdom, there was not one king that the bible refers to as being faithful to God. That's why Verse 7 says, "none of them calls on me". As most of us know, political leaders are often a reflection of what people want. All I'm saying is if all of those kings acted that way, I'm speculating that most of the Israelites living up there were no better. Therefore, we get all this condemnation of people who claim they serve the true God but their hearts are not in it. That's why we get all this condemnation here.
16. Verse 9: Foreigners sap his strength, but he does not realize it. His hair is sprinkled with gray, but he does not notice.
- a) Keep in mind the big picture here. God's complaining through Hosea how those who are called to be His people are not using their lives to make a difference for Him. Verse 9 has a reference to " Foreigners sap his strength". In context, it's about Israelites spending their time going after foreign gods or mixing their lives with nonbelievers. Let me explain that a little better:
    - i) One of the things God calls us to do as a witness for Him is to separate ourselves from nonbelievers. (See 2nd Corinthians 6:14.) That doesn't mean we can never talk to nonbelievers or never have a meal with them. It means we live differently as to be a witness for Jesus. I bring that up here as the idea of "foreigners sap his strength" is the idea of living like nonbelievers around us to the point where we're no longer living differently enough where we are separated for His use.
    - ii) The second reference is to gray hair. As we get older, our hair starts turning grey. The point is God's saying, "You've gone through life and you haven't even noticed that you're living no better than nonbelievers! You've been collectively at this for a long time now so it's like a person who's hair is turning gray but hasn't noticed the change since he or she has been living this way for a long time now."
  - b) The point for you and me is simply that we can get so set in our ways of ignoring God, we can get to a point where we've been doing this for so long, we can become useless to God as we no longer care about pleasing Him with our life. That's what's to be avoided!



17. Verse 10: Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him.
- a) Hosea's big point here is the evidence is obvious that the Israelites as a whole are ignoring how God wants them to live. Yet despite that evidence, they don't change their ways.
  - b) With that said, Hosea's got one more illustration to pull off in this chapter:
18. Verse 11: "Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless-- now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. <sup>12</sup> When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.
- a) To explain these verses, of all things I need to give a quick education on how doves will act when they feel threatened. They're not strong enough to attack predators. They will often try to distract predators away from their babies by pretending to be hurt. The idea is essentially, "attack me so others can get away safely". The problem is predators figure out pretty quickly that's their plan.
  - b) The point as it applies to the Israelites at that time is they tried appealing to both powers in that region for help. They sent envoys to both Assyria and Egypt in order to try to stop either power from overthrowing their small country.
  - c) God's effectively saying to them, "You turn to everyone for help, except Me. I'm the only one who can help you but you try everything else. Just like a dove who doesn't know any better on how to protect their young but to try a stupid distraction trick, so I'll trap you as I'm (God's) the one who wants to help you through this."
  - d) So are you saying I shouldn't get medical help in my time of need? Should I never ask my neighbor for help in a time of need? No that misses the point. My favorite description of living the Christian life is, "Pray like you have no other options and then do what you can however you can as if God's not there." My point is we never know how He will work in our lives. We have to give God the opportunity to get involved, then make good decisions as if no great miracle will occur. I believe God gives us the freedom to live however we do want to live as long as we're not violating any biblical principals to do so.
  - e) Let me explain this another way: If God knows all things, then He knows what will occur in our lives. Like a parent of a young child, we eventually have to let go of them so they'll learn to walk on their own. That's how God works in our lives. It doesn't mean He doesn't care about us if He's not doing a visible miracle every day. It means by trusting that He is guiding our lives, we're free to make the best decisions we can. We can assume He's going to guide us through our lives and do for us what we can do for ourselves.
  - f) OK John, that's neat. What does it have to do with these verses? Apparently the Israelites were doing anything and everything except trusting in God to guide their lives. That's the warning we're to get out of these verses. Again it leads back to God's dilemma: What does He have to do to draw us back to Him? Unfortunately if we ignore Him long enough, He will do what He has to do which includes trapping us as if we were a "dumb bird" that is not smart enough to know how to avoid predators. That's the illustration made here.
19. Verse 13: Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me.
- a) Speaking of God acting like He's got no choice left but to hurt those He's called to be His witness to the world, I present Verse 13. OK, by now we've all memorized the fact that God wiped out this nation 2,700 years ago for failing to be a witness for Him. We all get that. The issue for you and me is what do we have to do to avoid that same fate? It's not as hard as one thinks. It's about putting our time and our resources where we claim that our heart is. If we say we trust that Jesus paid for all our sins and we're saved because we believe it, the issue is what are we doing about it? I'm not saying we have to be a "Super Saint" who leads billions to Jesus. I'm saying that we have to make the effort to live as He desires we live as a witness for Him. It's not to earn His love, but to use our lives for the greatest purpose there is, to make a difference for the God who made us in the first place.

- b) Before I move on, I want you to notice the last phrase, "They speaks lies against me". I'm not positive what that means, but I suspect the Israelites were telling the Assyrians as well as the Egyptians effectively "Our God can't help us so we're turning to you for help." That is a great danger in life, when we effectively tell others we no longer trust in His power to redeem us and guide us to make a difference in the world. To trust in things of this world in order to find happiness is always a recipe for danger. That's the point here.
20. Verse 14: They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds. They gather together for grain and new wine but turn away from me.
- a) Here's another verse effectively saying, "We'll trust in anything but God for both our joy our help in our hour of need. The idea of gathering for grain and new wine is the idea of gathering to eat and have a good time, but never honoring the God who created them in the first place. The point for you and me is we'll never get any satisfaction out of life if we use it only for our own pleasure or trust only say in government for our solutions. God is more than willing to guide our lives for His glory if we're willing to take a step in faith of the fact He's there and willing to guide us. God never promises life will be easy. He does promise that He'll never forsake us through whatever we're facing and guide us so we can make that difference for Him that He desires.
21. Verse 15: I trained them and strengthened them, but they plot evil against me. <sup>16</sup> They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt.
- a) To paraphrase God speaking through Isaiah, "I'm the one responsible for the success they have for getting here and staying here. Instead of seeking Me like they should they turn to things of the world." In the bible the nation of Egypt often symbolically speaks of any thing we can worship other than God Himself. The idea of leaving Egypt is symbolic of leaving our old life to follow God.
- b) Bottom line, Hosea's predicting the destruction of his own country due to the fact that his fellow Israelites have been collectively ignoring God for centuries.
- c) Before I go to Chapter 8, which is short and is on the same theme, let me pause to ask why is God's judgment necessary on the world? We all understand God's grace, but why does He have to eternally punish those who turn from Him as well as punish those who He has called to make a difference for Him, but ignore Him? Why is all this judgment necessary?
- i) The obvious answer is we're saved for a purpose, to glorify Him in this world. To ignore that purpose is a waste of a life and judgment comes in many forms for it.
- ii) For the nonbeliever, realize that God is perfect and He expects perfection or being perfectly forgiven to be with Him forever. To turn down that free-gift is an insult that can't be forgiven over time.
- iii) Bottom line, we as believers are to fear His judgment or we can suffer if we fail to be a good witness for Him. Now that I've scared you, let's quickly do Chapter 8.
22. Chapter 8, Verse 1: Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.
- a) As I stated earlier, Hosea's not the kind of writer who says, "Here is what God is going to do so deal with it." He's more of an "ever widening circle" type of writer who'll bring up additional issues about God's judgment. All I'm saying is this text isn't a straight forward case of "here is what we're guilty of, now deal with the consequences". Instead Hosea will continue to explain the reasons for God's judgment mixed in with reasons why all of this is necessary. Bottom line, Hosea is continuing to explain why all this judgment is needed!
- b) Therefore, this verse starts by saying "put a trumpet to our lips" as a way of making a big announcement for everyone to hear. As to the eagle (or vulture in some translation), the idea is just as this bird sweeps down from the sky to catch it's prey, God's about to begin His judgment because the Israelites have broken God's laws with them. Earlier I talked of what's the judgment for breaking God's laws? Hosea's saying all of this is about to begin.

23. Verse 2: Israel cries out to me, 'O our God, we acknowledge you!'
- a) Is there a "too late"? Is there a point where we can sincerely say, "We're sorry for what we did, can you forgive us?" The real issue isn't whether or not we're sorry (when we're about to receive judgment), but are we really willing to change? Real change of our lifestyle is a hard thing to do and most people refuse because they're comfortable with the "as is".
  - b) I find that God sometimes has to "throw a wrench" in our lives to get us to face the fact we are not living as He desires. That means is God often allows us to go through some sort of trial to get us to act as He desires or sad as it is, bring down judgment when we fail to live as He desires. Most people acknowledge God exists and want Him to bless their lives but they don't want to deal with His judgment when they don't.
  - c) All I'm saying is just as we accept the fact God blesses us for obedience, we have to accept the idea that His judgment is equally as necessary. That leads me back to the question of "Is it ever too late?" Yes there is. I don't know when it is, but if God created us in the first place, He has every right to say to us collectively, "You knew how you should have acted and you are well aware of what you're doing wrong, and it's been that way for a long time now, so now judgment is coming!"
  - d) The second part of this verse says, "O our God, we acknowledge you!" Those Israelites did go through the motions of following God in some ways, but their hearts we're in it. It'd be like attending church once a week to get the guilt out of our system, but not changing our lifestyle based on the fact we claim to worship Him.
24. Verse 3: But Israel has rejected what is good; an enemy will pursue him.
- a) If there is a single one-line message in these chapters it is, "My people have been ignoring Me for so long, I as God can't take it anymore, so judgment has to come down hard now."
  - b) As always, the real issue isn't "them" but us! Even if we are devout Christians who use our lives to make a difference for Jesus, think of this lesson as the "motivation tool" to do what we've been called to do! If we feel guilty because we haven't done much for Jesus, think of this lesson as a "wake up call" about what life is really about! I'm not saying we all have to do more, I'm saying we have to live as God desires we live. It begins by seeking God in a prayer life and in His word, and asking ourselves how we can use our lives to make some sort of difference for Him. If we do that, no matter what happens to us in our life, we will "win" and not be a part of that judgment.
  - c) Meanwhile, the Israelites are about to suffer the consequences of ignoring God. Hosea is telling us of that nation coming to an end very soon as judgment is coming down!
25. Verse 4: They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.
- a) As I've stated a bunch of times in these Hosea lessons, the history of the Northern Israelite Kingdom reads like a horror story. Not one king was ever loyal to God. Four of the last 6 were assassinated. Idolatry was common as people took silver and gold to make statues of the deities they worshiped. It'd be like asking God, so why is all this judgment coming? If we look carefully, the evidence is all around us! That's Hosea's point here.
  - b) Yes this lesson is designed to keep us on the "straight and narrow" by reminding us of the consequences of turning from Him. The good news is we're almost done, so bear with me as I go through the last 10 verses of this lesson.
26. Verse 5: Throw out your calf-idol, O Samaria! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? <sup>6</sup> They are from Israel! This calf--a craftsman has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria.
- a) A little history would be helpful here: A few hundred years before Hosea, when Israel did split into two nations, the kings in the North were worried about the people going back to Jerusalem (in the South). Therefore the "North" created their own religion mixing some of the aspects of Judaism with their own religion. That's why we get a reference to a "calf". It was an Egyptian God and the people living up North worshipped it as a god.

- b) Realize that Samaria was a city and the capital of the Northern Kingdom. All I'm saying is we're reading of God's judgment coming down on the North based on hundreds of years of the Israelites ignoring God and now it's judgment time.
  - c) To quote a famous line, "The mills of God turn slowly, but thoroughly". That's the idea of God's judgment comes slowly, but when it does come it is very thorough.
  - d) OK then, this was 2,700 years ago, is judgment coming to our country and when? The next verse "accidentally" leads to that question.
27. Verse 7: "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.
- a) For us movie buff's I read Verse 7 and I think of the 1960 movie "Inherit the Wind". If you don't know the story, it is a fictional account of a 1925 court case about a man who wanted to teach Darwinism in school but wasn't allowed to. The prosecuting attorney was a very strong Christian and the key movie line was the first sentence of Verse 7. The idea of that phrase is about the idea of going down the wrong path in life, we "sow what we reap".
  - b) John, that trial was hundred years ago and Darwinism is commonly taught today. If you are right, why hasn't God's judgment come yet? Realize it took several hundred years for God to bring down judgment the Israelite kingdoms. Again, realize the mills of God turn slowly, but also very thoroughly. Do I think the United States or the world for that matter is ripe for His judgment? Of course. I can't fix the world. All I can do is be a good witness for Jesus in a lost and dying world and try to help as many as I can before it occurs. That's how we are expected to live until His judgment comes down.
  - c) In the meantime, Hosea's being literal here. Just as God's judgment is about to begin there in the Northern Kingdom, so foreigners will eat the next crop as it comes up!
28. Verse 8: Israel is swallowed up; now she is among the nations like a worthless thing.
- a) Hosea is writing "past tense about the future" here, saying "it's now a done deal, so go live with the consequences". A few more details of "why" are in the next few verses.
29. Verse 9: For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has sold herself to lovers. <sup>10</sup> Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king.
- a) In order to prevent the Assyrians from overrunning their country, the "North" did try to bribe their way out of that situation. That's why Hosea uses the phrase, " Ephraim (that's the capital city) has sold herself to lovers." That's God's way of telling them they haven't put their faith in Him and are trying to avoid the inevitable by bribery!
  - b) Anyway God's saying, "this won't work, it's too late and judgment is coming now!"
  - c) OK then, four more judgment verses to deal with before we wrap this up!
30. Verse 11: "Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning.
- a) I'm pretty positive I've beaten the point home through this lesson that the "North" didn't give up religion, they just ignored the true God to do so. Here Hosea's saying that lots of places existed there for sin offering, they didn't put their hearts into it. It is like thinking I just made an offering for my sin, now I'm free to go live how I want. The next time I do it, I can just make another offering, and I don't have to fear the results of my sins."
  - b) It should be obvious by now, that's not how it works, and that's Hosea's point here.
31. Verse 12: I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien. <sup>13</sup> They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat, but the LORD is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt.
- a) You want to know how God expects to live, read the bible! That's Hosea's point in Verse 12. If you think that's "Old Testament", realize Jesus effectively said the same thing. (See Luke 16:29). The point of these verses is the Israelites were going through the motions of worshipping God, but their hearts were not in it. Since I've been beating that point all of this whole lesson, I won't go any further there.

- b) Again the key point is judgment is coming and now we have to deal with it.
  - c) One last point on these verses. It says, " They will return to Egypt." Historically we know Hosea is not being literal because those that survived through the Assyrian conquest were scattered all through that empire. What Hosea meant here is "return to Egypt" is a way of saying the Israelites have returned to living like other nations around them as if they're no longer living as a witness for God. That's the point here.
32. Verse 14: Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; Judah has fortified many towns. But I will send fire upon their cities and it shall devour his palaces."
- a) Notice this section ends with a reference to Judah. That's the Southern Kingdom. God is effectively saying the "North" is living comfortably as if judgment is not coming. Those in the "South" are another prize to be conquered, but the "South" is still about 100 years away from their own judgment, as they failed to learn from their neighbors up north.
  - b) If there is a bottom line of this lesson, it is "Judgment's coming, we have to deal with it." It is how I opened this lesson and it's appropriate that I close it on the same note.
33. Final thoughts: I'm well aware this lesson was tough sledding. I squeezed in a lot of verse here as I am well aware they all cover similar ground. For those of us who've dedicated our lives to make a difference for Jesus, this lesson is the tough reminder that it's all worth it. I always consider His judgment a necessary motivation to stick to what He's called us to do in life. Think of this whole lesson as God's reminder to us that His judgment is just as much a part of His nature as His grace to us for trusting in Him. If we get that, we get why all of this necessary.
34. With that said, I ask that you join me in a closing prayer.
35. Heavenly Father, Just as You ask us to accept Your grace, so we must also accept Your judgment not only on the world, but the fact you disciple those you've separated from the world to go be a living witness for You. We thank you that we are among those who You've called. Help us to use our lives as a witness for You. Guide us and help us to realize that even the tough things we must go through in life are ultimately ordained by You so that we may be even a better witness for You through such times. Despite that discipline, help us to be the type of witness You have called us to be. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.