

# OpenTheo

## Hosea: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

February 18, 2022



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## Transcript

Hosea is the first of the twelve minor prophets, which, running from Hosea to Malachi, conclude the Old Testament canon. Isaiah, Jeremiah with Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel are typically classed as the major prophets, while Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi are referred to as the minor prophets, chiefly on account of their shorter length. While there are twelve books of the minor prophets, since before the time of Christ they were treated as a single book, the Book of the Twelve.

The books within the book were divided from each other, but they belonged to a greater single book, and were volumes within it. In the writings of Ben Siria in the 2nd century BC, for instance, the twelve minor prophets are referred to in a manner that suggests that they were classed as a single text. In Acts chapter 7 verse 42, Stephen refers to the book, singular, of the prophets when citing Amos.

Melito of Sardis in the 2nd century AD also refers to the twelve in one book. The ordering of the twelve volumes of the Book of the Twelve varies in different textual traditions. Christian orderings of the Twelve follow the order of the Masoretic text.

The prophecies contained in the Book of the Twelve cover a period of Israel's history from the first half of the 8th century BC to around the middle of the 5th century BC, addressing situations before and after the exile, moving from an emphasis on judgement to one of restoration. The Book of the Twelve is held together by themes such as that of the Day of the Lord. Some scholars have also seen connections between the books and their current ordering, observing catchphrases that connect the beginning of books to the end of those that preceded them, although some of the volumes seem to have a more stable place within the larger book.

For instance, Hosea chapter 14 verse 7 mentions the flourishing of the grain and the wine, but then Joel chapter 1 refers to the laying waste of the grain and the wine by the locust invasion. In Joel chapter 3 verse 16 we read, The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem. The exact same words are taken up in Amos chapter 1 verse 2. Hosea is one of the longest of the twelve minor prophets, with only Zechariah being longer than it.

It is the first of the volumes of the Book of the Twelve in both the Septuagint and in the

Masoretic text. Not all of the books of the minor prophets can clearly be dated, but Hosea begins by giving us the period of Hosea's prophetic ministry. Hosea was a close contemporary of Isaiah, prophesying during the reigns of the same kings.

Amos also prophesied during the reign of Uzziah, which suggests that Hosea might not have been the earliest of the minor prophets. Hosea lived during an exceedingly eventful period in the history of Israel and Judah. The power of Assyria rose rapidly under Tigilath-Pileser III to become the dominant force in the region.

It would later overthrow the northern kingdom and it almost overcame the southern kingdom of Judah too. As Assyrian power rose, the kingdom of Israel flourished for a time under Jeroboam II as the Arameans were weakened and no longer troubled it. Israel's foreign policy was a fraught issue during this period as it had to determine whether to throw in its lot with the Assyrians or Arameans or whether it had to do so with the Assyrians.

Differences on this question seem to have contributed to the extreme political instability of Israel after the death of Jeroboam II. After his death there were a number of kings in short succession. Around 738 BC, Pekah the king of Israel formed an alliance with Rezin the Syrian, a former enemy, and they attacked Judah and Jerusalem in the Syro-Ephraimite war around 733 BC.

Ahaz of Judah appealed to Assyria for aid and Tigilath-Pileser III defeated the northern kingdom and set up Hosea as an Assyrian vassal. However, after Tigilath-Pileser's death, Hosea rebelled and sought to align Israel with Egypt instead. The Assyrians came up against Samaria and the northern kingdom fell around 722 BC.

Hosea's ministry spanned this period of immense upheaval. Hosea speaks to both the northern and the southern kingdoms, both Israel and Judah, within his prophecy, although his focus is more upon the north. Although the kingdoms were separate, the people were a single, albeit divided, family, and even though they were at war with each other for some periods of Hosea's ministry, we should expect some sense of their kinship would always have been present.

Although Hosea seems to have been a prophet operating chiefly in the north, it is the names of the kings of Judah that head the list of the kings during whose reigns Hosea ministered. Furthermore, Jeroboam II's reign ended around 746 BC and Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah all reigned during the period after that time in Judah, Hezekiah coming to the throne around 715 BC. It is possible that Hosea moved to the southern kingdom of Judah as things heated up for him in the north, as his message went contrary to the nation's foreign policy.

Verse 2 introduces the first of the words delivered by the Lord through Hosea, likely around 750 BC, as it deals with the house of Jehu, which ended less than a year after the

death of Jeroboam II. The opening three chapters of the Book of Hosea contain elements of narrative and present the hero of the Book of the Twelve with an arresting metaphor for the Lord's relationship with his people at its very opening. While several biblical prophets were instructed to perform various prophetic sign acts, perhaps none is so shocking as the one that Hosea was given here, taking a wife of Horeb.

In this chapter, Hosea is commanded to perform actions by the Lord on four successive occasions. The first occasion, given in verse 2, outlines the Lord's commission to Hosea more generally. He must take a wife of Horeb and have children of Horeb.

The wife of Horeb was a woman of sexual ill repute, whether on account of prostitution or something else. To marry such a woman would be shameful, and that shame would also affect the way that the children of the union would be regarded. It seems most likely that the children that were born were Hosea's own children, but they would have carried the deep stigma of being children of a whore.

The power of the prophetic sign is seen in the relationship between this disgraced woman and the land, presumably thereby referring to the unfaithful Israelites. Throughout scripture, adultery and idolatry are repeatedly related. The Lord entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai, taking her as his bride, yet she had proven unfaithful to him.

Such a metaphor for the Lord's relationship with Israel is developed at length in Ezekiel chapter 16, although no other prophet was given a commission so remarkable as that of Hosea here in order to illustrate it. Hosea obeys the Lord's commission by taking a woman called Gomer, the daughter of Diblahim, as his wife. When she conceived and bore a son, Hosea was instructed to name him Jezreel.

Such naming of children as prophetic signs is also seen in Isaiah chapter 8 verses 3-4. And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Call his name Meher-shal-al-hashbaz.

For before the boy knows how to cry, my father or my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Syria will be carried away before the king of Assyria. The name Jezreel probably relates to scattering. The valley of Jezreel was a strategic geographic location in the land of Israel in the north, giving access to its territory.

Jezreel was also the site of Jehu's defeat of the Omrides, the house of Ahab. However, the blood of Jezreel would soon come back on the head of the house of Jehu, which would be cut off shortly afterwards. Having named one son after scattering, and in allusion to the bloody dawn of the house of Jehu that would soon be matched with its bloody sunset, Hosea has a second child by Gomer, this time a daughter.

This child has a more troubling name, No-mercy. Israel relied upon the covenant mercy

and goodness of God for its continued existence. For the Lord to cease to extend such mercy to her was a serious matter indeed.

The Lord would not, however, spare Israel, which would fall to the Assyrians. Nevertheless, he declares that he would have mercy on the house of Judah. Judah was miraculously delivered from the Assyrians by the angel of the Lord, just when it seemed as though Jerusalem was doomed.

The third and final child born to Gomer was a son, to be called Not-my-people, the most threatening name of all. The familiar covenant formula was that God would be the people's God and that they would be his people. However, this child is named after the inverse or negation of that.

You are not my people and I am not your God. The covenant bond is broken. The chapter ends on the most surprising note, however.

It moves from a devastating statement of judgment to one of restoration, so quickly that the hero might get whiplash. The final two verses reverse the previous judgments. The children of Israel would be multiplied as the sand of the sea in fulfillment of the promises first given to Abraham.

The people who had been scattered would now be gathered. Jezreel, which was the place of the fall of the dynasty and the influx of the adversaries into the land, would become the place where a united people would venture forth against their enemies as a mighty power under one presumably Davidic king. A question to consider, can you think of other occasions in the prophetic literature where Israel is compared to an unfaithful wife? In Hosea chapter 1, as a prophetic sign, the Lord had instructed Hosea to take a wife of Horeb, a woman of shameful sexual reputation, and to have children by her.

Hosea had married Gomer and fathered three children by her, which the Lord commanded him to name Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People. In this way Hosea symbolized the Lord's relationship with his unfaithful people and the judgment that would come upon them. At the end of the chapter, however, there was a remarkable change of tone from judgment to mercy as the Lord promised the regathering and restoration of his people.

The prophecies of chapter 2 have the actions of chapter 1 as their background. The chapter opens with a statement that seems to be distinct from, yet related to, the prophecy of grace with which chapter 1 concludes. As with the concluding verses of chapter 1, it plays off the names of the children, reversing the judgments that they spoke of.

The naming of the second son, Not My People, is answered with the statement, You are my people, and the naming of the daughter, No Mercy, is answered with the statement,

You have received mercy. Paul refers back to Hosea chapter 1 verse 10 to 2 verse 1 in Romans chapter 9 verses 25 to 26. There he also relates its statements to Gentiles, who were never formerly God's people, yet who are made part of the people of God through the work of Christ.

As Joshua Moon argues, the metaphors drawn from chapter 1 that chapter 2 explores should be treated as loose-fitting metaphors exploited for rhetorical ends. For instance, in verse 2, the children are charged to plead with their mother to reject her whoring. Of course, within the metaphor, both the mother and the children are Israel.

A similar metaphor is developed in places like Jeremiah chapter 3. Perhaps this use of the metaphor allows the more faithful Israelite to figure themselves into the picture. They are children of a disgraceful mother, now disowned by her former husband, on account of whom they suffer great shame and stigma. However, as Andrew Dearman observes, it is possible that the mother is supposed to represent Samaria as the capital of Israel.

While some of the children may not even be party to or supportive of their mother's whoring, they are ostracized on account of it. The best that they can do is to plead with their mother, with the nation more generally, to abandon its gross unfaithfulness to the Lord. If the nation does not repent, it will be stripped naked.

It will both lose all the riches it gained from its divine husband and will suffer great public shame and indignity. The disgraced and disowned wife seems to relate to the land here, which will be made like a parched wilderness, unable to sustain life. Stripping naked is elsewhere used to refer to the spoiling of the land and the capture of its people by their adversaries, for instance in Ezekiel chapter 16 verses 36 to 39.

Thus says the Lord God, because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them. Therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated. I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness.

And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare.

The children of this mother will also be disowned. The nation went after its lovers, its false gods, wrongly attributing to their generosity the manifold blessings that she enjoyed in the good land that she inhabited, when all of these really came from the Lord.

The Lord, however, would frustrate this adulterous wife in all of her ways, hedging them up with thorns and dooming her pursuit of her lovers to futility.

All she would succeed in would be bringing ruin upon herself. Like the prodigal son in Luke, this shameful woman would seek to return to the one that she had dishonoured by her behaviour, recognising that her condition had been better formerly. According to the laws of divorce in places like Deuteronomy chapter 24 verses 1 to 4, a return to a former husband would be closed to her.

Jeremiah the prophet makes a similar point in Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 1. However, perhaps we are supposed to regard the whoring wife here more as hopelessly estranged from a man who is still technically her husband than as one divorced. Israel had ignorantly regarded the baals as the source of her blessings and had also devoted her riches to the service of them. The Lord, as he stripped her of his gifts and of all the things with which he had provided for and sustained her, would leave her naked and uncovered in the sight of her lovers.

She had exposed herself to them in her idolatry, but now she would be exposed to them in shame. The Lord would cut off the festal occasions that marked the regular seasons of the life of the nation. He would give her cultivated orchards and vineyards over to the wild forest and make their fruits food for the beasts.

In all of this, her actions in going after the baals and forgetting the Lord would come back upon her own head. As in chapter 1, however, the dark message of judgment is followed by a surprising message of restoration. Despite all that Israel had done, all of the ways that she had betrayed the Lord as her husband, the covenant bond would be restored and the Lord would deal with her tenderly in ways which recall the early years of the marriage when he had first led her out into the wilderness in the exodus.

Earlier in the book, the wilderness was the result of judgment, yet here it represents the hope beyond hope of a return to the intimacy of the earliest period of the covenant after all of the treachery and infidelity that had subsequently occurred. While earlier the unfaithful wife had rather presumptuously sought to return to her husband, whom she had greatly dishonored, now it is the husband who is pursuing the wife who betrayed him, not merely bringing her home in disgrace, but wooing her once more. The valley of Achor is presumably here presented as a door into the promised land, first receiving its name in Joshua chapter 7 after the execution of Achan after his sin at Jericho.

Israel would respond to the Lord as she once did. Although she had formerly worshipped the Lord in a syncretistic manner, treating him as one of the Baals, now she would express a more fitting covenant intimacy, addressing the Lord as her husband. Baal, in the sense of master or lord, was a term occasionally used for husbands, but here it would be replaced by the mutual intimacy conveyed by the term husband.

The names of the Baals, her former lovers, would be removed from her mouth as she would no longer call upon them in worship. The Lord would provide for and protect them, saving them from predatory animals and warring neighbors. He would secure the relationship once more, betrothing them to himself in covenant faithfulness.

This restoration would demonstrate his character, faithfulness and sovereignty. Knowing the Lord here also implies the intimacy appropriate to the marital relationship. As Israel calls upon the Lord once more, the Lord will answer, and the reciprocity between heavens and earth that sustains the fertility of the land would be established.

The heavens would drop down rain, and the earth would answer with fruitfulness in grain, wine and oil. The end of the chapter brings with it the reversal of all of the negative connotations of the names of Hosea's prophetically named children by Gomer. Jezreel is no longer associated with the bloody rise and fall of the dynasty of Jehu, but with its meaning, God sows.

God will sow the people in the land, much as he speaks of doing in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 27. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of No mercy will receive mercy, and not my people will be told, You are my people, and will answer, You are my God. A question to consider, the prophetic sign act of taking the wife of Hordam and having children of Hordam, and the prophecies associated with it, would have played out over several years.

How do you imagine this would have affected the way that Hosea's message was received? Why do you think that the Lord appointed such a sign act? In Hosea chapter 1, the prophet was instructed by the Lord to take a wife of Hordam and to have children of Hordam by her. He had married Gomer and had three children by her, Jezreel, No mercy, and Not my people. In taking such a wife, Hosea would have invited shame upon himself, and his children would also have carried a stigma.

All of this represented the Lord's relationship with unfaithful Israel, but the statements of judgement were followed by promises of restoration. The names that formerly spoke of the people's judgement were given very different connotations as the Lord reversed their former sentence. While chapter 1 described the Lord's instruction to Hosea in the third person, in chapter 3 there is a shift to a first person account, as Hosea himself takes up the narrative.

Hosea is instructed to take Gomer, a woman who was loved by another man and is an adulteress, back to himself. More particularly, he is charged to love her. Here Gomer is presented not merely as sexually shameful, as a wife of Hordam, but as guilty of adultery with another man.

She isn't only a dishonourable woman more generally, but a woman who has openly



betrayed Hosea. The emphasis on the verb love in verse 1, which John Goldengay highlights, underlines the emotional stakes of the situation. The adultery of the wife is made so much more painful, shameful and cruel on account of the fervent love that her husband has for her.

This is not a woman rejecting an indifferent or abusive husband, but a wife turning her back on the husband who loves her most deeply. The cakes of raisins are associated with gifts and expressions of love, as in places like Song of Solomon chapter 2 verse 5. Presumably they were used as some part of idolatrous celebrations. In loving this unfaithful woman, Hosea is taking on a position analogous to the Lord's relationship with Israel.

He is assuming a position that will help him to understand more fully the heart of God. Gomer seems to have been reduced to bond service, as Hosea has to redeem her from a master by a price. The relationship however is re-established through this redemption.

In verse 3, Hosea expresses the faithfulness that was to characterize his relationship with his formerly wayward and shameful wife Gomer from that point onwards. She must dwell as his, he would be faithful to her, and she must be faithful to him. We ought to appreciate the shame that Hosea would be assuming in taking such a woman back to himself.

The rationale for the first command in verse 1, loving a woman who was loved by another man, was the Lord's own love for his people of Israel. The rationale for Hosea's speech to Gomer in verse 3 is given in the verses that follow, in verses 4 and 5. Just as Gomer has been reduced to a sort of servitude, so the children of Israel must be reduced, losing the form of privilege and status that they had enjoyed. They would be without king or prince, sacrifice or pillar, ephod or household gods.

The king and prince were marks of Israel's sovereignty and their standing among the surrounding nations. The removal of the sacrifice and the pillar refer to the loss of Israel's cultic life, whether associated with idolatrous practice or the worship of the Lord. The ephod and the household gods were means of divining God's will.

The ephod had the Urim and the Thummim, and the household gods would also be consulted by idolaters. They would lose their national status, they would lose their communion with God, and they'd also lose direction and means of guidance. However, just as the reducing of Gomer to servitude was not the end of her story, so Israel would know restoration as they returned and sought the Lord their God, and David their king.

The nation that had rejected the house of David would return to David. They would also return to the Lord and once more know his goodness in the latter days. A question to consider.

In the ministry of Hosea, he represents the Lord in his taking of this unfaithful wife. When he speaks, he speaks as the one who's the prophet of the Lord, but also the one who's symbolizing the Lord. How might his symbolizing of the Lord's relationship with his people have changed the way that people heard the message, and also changed the way that he received and delivered it himself? The opening three chapters of Hosea concern the prophetic sign act of his taking a wife of Hordim as a symbol of the Lord's relationship with unfaithful Israel.

In chapter four, we enter the main body of the prophecies of the book, which opens with a powerful indictment upon the people. Joshua Moon describes the centrality of the land within this prophecy. In part because of the condensed form, the text plays a role as virtually a paradigm of Hosea's message of judgment.

And the central facet of that paradigm is the land. The accused are inhabitants in the land. The failure of covenantal obligations happens in the land.

In judgment, the land mourns. This manner of speaking trades on the ancient motif of a deity as sovereign over its land, with the people standing as tenants who can be removed for violation of the deity's terms. By concentrating our focus on the land, echoes of eviction, exile, can be heard without any explicit mention being made.

Hosea chapter four, verses one to three, introduce a controversy or confrontation with the people of the land on account of their unfaithfulness. Verses one to three could be read as an introduction to the main body of the book's prophecies more generally. It demands the people's attention, declares the fact that the Lord has a controversy with them, gives the content of the controversy, and speaks of the Lord's judgment that rests upon them.

In particular, the people lack the essential qualities that the Lord would look for in a covenant partner, faithfulness, steadfast love, and the knowledge of him. Instead, the Lord lists a litany of sins that fill the land, clear breaches of the ten commandments. John Goldengate compares the indictment to the description of humanity prior to the flood.

Although this prophecy was likely delivered during the reign of Jeroboam the second, a period during which things were relatively stable, such a situation would not last for long. Verse three describes a languishing of the land and of its inhabitants, both man and beast, that corresponds with its spiritual languishing. The exact way that we should translate verse four is something commentators are divided on.

Moon, for instance, places the first half of the verse in quotation marks as the words of an opponent of Hosea. Goldengate extends the words of the supposed opponent of Hosea to run to the end of verse five. The words of the opponent pick up the language of the opening statement of verses one to three concerning the Lord's contention.

The response of the Lord through Hosea is to sharpen the charge, directing it at the priest more particularly. For with you is my contention, O priest. In the inquest concerning the spiritual failure of the people, the blame is largely placed at the feet of the religious leaders, the priest and the prophet.

They are unreliable guides who do not know the way. They themselves will stumble. The reference to the destruction of the priest's mother, as Andrew Dearman notes, recalls the symbolism of Goma earlier in the book.

It might be a reference to the nation more generally or to the capital city of Samaria. The priest with whom the Lord is contending is held responsible for the people's lack of knowledge. They are destroyed on account of the ignorance of the priest, who has rejected knowledge, and so the Lord rejects the priest.

The priest, who was charged to teach and uphold the law of the Lord among the people, has forgotten the law, so the Lord will forget his children. Along with the destruction of the mother, the forgetting of the children also recalls the opening chapters and Hosea's prophetic sign. Moon makes the important observation that, taken with the rejection of the priest himself, the rejection of the priest's mother and children represents the cutting off of all generations.

We should also recognise the poetic justice that the Lord manifests in his judgement. Rejecting knowledge leads to rejection from being priest. The priest's forgetting the law leads to the Lord's forgetting of the priest's children.

The priesthood is supposed to address the guilt of the people. However, the priesthood is currently exacerbating the people's sin. As a consequence, the Lord would strip them of the honour of their status.

In the sacrificial system, the priests ate the sin offerings in order to seal atonement for the The Lord plays upon this language in verse 8. The priests feed on the sin of the people. But really, rather than serving as part of the atonement for and disposal of the sins of the people, the priests are actually greedy for and sustained by the people's sins. The priests may fancy that their position of privilege grants them some immunity from the Lord's judgement, but they will find that they will be punished along with the people, receiving the recompense for their deeds.

As they have sought to feed on the people's sins, they will not be satisfied. As they engage in whoredom, they would be rendered fruitless. They have abandoned the Lord for the sake of their lusts and the insensibility of intoxication.

They should have been guarding the people of the Lord, and as they have failed to do so, the people are given over to idolatry, pathetically looking to pieces of wood for guidance. The priests, in their failure faithfully to perform their duties, have encouraged the spirit

of whoredom among the people, who pursue idolatry throughout the land in its various cultic sites. As a consequence of their failure to guard and guide the people of the Lord, the Lord would give the women of their households over to a spirit of whoredom, bringing shame and disgrace upon them, as their daughters became prostitutes and their wives took-hold of them.

What's more, the Lord would not punish their daughters or their wives for such sins. The husband's right to protest the sin of the women of their households and bringing shame upon them is greatly diminished by the fact that they have been bringing dishonor upon themselves. They have been engaging in idolatrous sexual rituals with cult prostitutes and also having relations with common whores.

They have no grounds for protest. We might recall Judah and Tamar in Genesis chapter 38, where Judah was exposed as having no grounds upon which to cast judgment upon his daughter-in-law, as he was guilty of the very sin of which he accused her. Israel is so far gone that the Lord's one hope is that Judah not be infected by their infidelity.

Judah must be quarantined from the epidemic of idolatry that is destroying Israel, giving the sites and practices of Israel's idolatrous abominations ground zero for the infection, a very wide berth. Given Israel's stubborn rebellion, can the Lord gently tend the nation as a shepherd might provide for a docile lamb? Certainly not. Ephraim, another name for the northern nation of Israel after the leading northern tribe, must be kept at a distance, lest his idolatry and compulsive iniquity prove contagious.

Now a strong wind has arrived and will put them to shame as it carries them off in judgment. A question to consider. The priest is especially singled out as responsible here.

What insights do we have elsewhere in scripture for the cause of the weight of the responsibility that lies on the shoulders of the priest in such matters? Hosea chapter 5 continues the controversy or contention the Lord had with Israel that began in the preceding chapter. That chapter had focused especially upon the leaders, but in this chapter the prophecy expands its address to challenge the people more generally. Once again the people are summoned to attention to the word of the Lord.

The priest, the house of Israel and the royal house are all addressed. While the leaders are especially responsible, they are not responsible to the exclusion of the people more broadly. Joshua Moon suggests that verse 1's claim concerning the leaders that the judgment is theirs should be heard as a double entendre.

The task of judgment belongs to the leaders, but theirs is also the indictment that is to follow. The first half of verse 2 is difficult to translate. Andrew Dearman, for instance, adopts an amended reading of the text that yields a line that continues the sentence of the preceding verse, giving Moon differs from this rendering on two key counts.

First, he argues that Misper and Tabor are presented as victims of the traps, not perpetrators of them. Second, he argues that the point of the second verse is that the leaders are knee-deep in the blood of those they were supposed to lead. Most scholars argue that the snares nets and pits in view are likely sites of pagan cultic worship at the locations in question, with the places not presented principally as victims or as perpetrators, but more as sites of traps that have been laid for the people.

The Lord knows the hearts and the actions of his people. They cannot hide their sin from his sight. Their adultery and defilement is not a secret, but is known to their divine husband and their deeds prevent them from returning to him.

They have cut themselves off from his presence and blessing. Their ignorance of the Lord and their devotion to a spirit of whoredom establish enmity between them and God, marking them out for judgment. Israel's brazen pride is self-incriminating, evidencing their stubborn impenitence and incorrigibility.

Their sins bring their own accompanying traps that Israel readily stumbles into, but which will also snare his brother Judah. People's sins can greatly complicate life for them and have consequences that serve as their own natural punishments. This is the case for Israel and Ephraim.

Verse 4 declared that the deeds of Israel prevented them from returning to God. Verse 6 describes their futile quest to find him. They will try to pursue the Lord in his favor with great sacrifices of flocks and herds, but they will find that he has withdrawn from them and will not heed them.

No amount of religious ritual will succeed in restoring their relationship with the Lord when they are so alienated from him in their behavior and affections. Returning to the metaphor of marital infidelity that frames the book of Hosea, they have begotten bastard children through their consorting with idols. Cultic practices, divinely ordained and pagan, were often associated with new moon festivals, seeking fertility.

However, now the new moon would herald the devouring of them and their fields, becoming its opposite. Alternatively, as that proposed meaning of the second half of verse 7 is obscure, Hans Walter Wolff suggests an alternative version of the text, which gives the statement, now the locusts shall devour their fields. The prophecy to this point has mostly focused on Israel, with only a secondary reference to Judah in verse 5. Now, however, Benjamin, the southern tribe whose territory was the borderland of the kingdom of Judah, between Judah and Israel, comes into view.

What exactly verse 8 refers to is unclear. Many read it as a reference to the Syro-Ephraimite war, as the Syrians and Israel went south to attack Judah, approaching Jerusalem itself around 735 BC. The verse, some argue, speaks to the northern kingdom, which has at this point taken the territory of Benjamin, warning them that they are about

to face its last.

This, however, as Moon argues, presents problems as an interpretation. It would suggest that in taking Benjamin, Judah was like a party moving a landmark, rather than merely recovering its own land. Also, verse 13 seems to refer to an appeal to the king of Syria coming from Ephraim, the northern kingdom, not from Judah, as it did during the Syro-Ephraimite war.

This said, however, there are other ways of reading the statement of verse 13 that would be more consistent with the setting during the Syro-Ephraimite war, when Judah sought aid from the Assyrians against Israel and the Syrians. It could refer to Israel's sending of tribute to Assyria after Hosea's coup against Pekah and his hope that that might secure peace. The prophecy speaks of devastation falling on both kingdoms.

Moon writes, Hosea points to the destruction of the north, verse 9, and the south, verse 10, and it is Benjamin's location between the two condemned regions that lends desperation to the summons to battle. Where will Benjamin turn if destruction presses from both sides? Both northern and southern kingdom face desolation on account of their own commitments to iniquity. The Lord's word is sure.

Judah has been land grabbing, not honoring the boundaries of their brother to the north, and will also face judgment as a result. The Lord himself is like a sickness or a rot that clings to Ephraim and Judah, consuming them and wasting them away. Israel seeks deliverance from its wound from Assyria, most likely as Hosea turned to Assyria, becoming their vassal after he had conspired against Pekah and brought him down, replacing him as king of Israel.

However, Israel's wound was far deeper than Assyria could help with. The Lord himself was the sickness that afflicted his unfaithful people. He, not Assyria, was the predator that was going to tear them to pieces.

No one could deliver them from his clutches. Only if they were to confess their fault and truly turn back to him could they be delivered, but there is currently no sign that they are about to do that. A question to consider, after the division of the kingdom, what are some of the different ways in which the kingdoms of Judah and Israel relate to each other in their respective sins and states of judgment? Hosea chapter 5 ended with a description of the sickness of Ephraim and Judah, a sickness which could not be healed by the king of Assyria.

They had cut themselves off from the Lord by their sins, and the Lord was like a predatory lion to them, about to maul them. The hope of their deliverance was expressed in the final verse, I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me. Chapter 6 opens with a different voice, perhaps the voice of Israel in response to the words of the Lord.

However, sadly, these words are probably not the actual words of Israel itself, although some commentators have taken them that way, and the chapter divisions in our Bibles might lend themselves to that understanding. Rather, these might be the words that the Lord is hoping to hear from his people, the words that would represent the acknowledgement of their guilt and the earnest seeking of the Lord referenced at the end of the preceding chapter. Another likely possibility is mentioned by Joshua Moon, that these are the words of the Prophet himself encouraging the people, as one of them himself, to return to the Lord.

The Lord has turned back from them, so they must turn back to him. The Lord, as we have seen, is the real source of Israel's sickness, and consequently getting right with him is the real hope of their healing. No lesser power will be able to deliver or restore them.

The Lord could revive them in a short period of time, raising them up after two days, on the third day, enabling them to live before him once more. Alternatively, rather than seeing the after two days and on the third day as two ways of speaking of the same thing, some commentators see this more as an example of the sort of numerical formula that we encounter elsewhere in the Old Testament, in statements such as, for three transgressions of Judah and for four, or three things are too wonderful for me, four I do not understand. The connection of healing with deliverance from death here, especially as the raising up occurs on the third day, has unsurprisingly excited Christian readers of this text.

Saint Augustine is just one of many examples of Christian theologians who heard this text as a prophecy of Christ and his resurrection. Indeed, the claim that Jesus was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, which we find in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 4, has been heard as an allusion to these verses in Hosea. While the story of Jonah has also been proposed as a background for 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 4, three days and three nights is a weaker connection than on the third day.

Moon is likely correct in seeing Hosea chapter 6 verse 2 as the central text in Paul's reference to a more general theme in the Old Testament scriptures, connecting a broader motif of the third day as the day of deliverance after a period of testing, with the specific event of resurrection. We might think the third day provision of a substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah, the third day restoration of the chief cupbearer, the third day theophany of the Lord at Mount Sinai, the third day healing of King Hezekiah, or the third day appearance of Esther before King Ahasuerus. Moon assembles a fascinating array of Jewish texts that connect resurrection more generally with the third day.

In Christ, the third day resurrection expected for the faithful more generally becomes focused on the one man who stands at their head, the condensed expression and anticipation of the destiny of the people as a whole, which will be achieved in and through him. The question of whether the raising up is a raising up from death or a

raising up from sickness shouldn't be pressed too strongly. Andrew Dearman writes, likely the difference that modern readers assume between recovery from illness and resurrection from the dead was understood more synthetically by the ancients.

Sickness could be the intrusion of the powers of death and recovery could be understood as a new gift of life. In verse 3, the Lord is compared to the dawn and the rains, the source of life and fertility within the land. He is the faithful provider and sustainer and if Israel returns to him, he will be their restorer.

However, while the Lord as the source of healing might be like the life-giving sun and rains, which consistently nourish and revive the land, Israel and Judah are fickle, their love like morning mist that soon vanishes. The Lord has prosecuted his covenant against them by his prophets, sending forth his judgments and calling them to account. His judgments are described as like the light going forth, piercing the darkness and revealing what has formerly been hidden.

What the Lord desires from his people above all else is covenant loyalty and genuine knowledge of him. Sacrificial ritual apart from such devotion is empty and vain. Sacrifice was always supposed to function as a sort of enacted prayer and performance of sacrifice apart from the genuine love of the Lord was a form of people's drawing near to the Lord with their lips while their hearts were far from him.

This is a common theme in the message of the prophets and the Psalms. In 1st Samuel chapter 15 verse 22, the prophet Samuel declares the Lord's judgment to the rejected King Saul. And Samuel said, has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams.

The Lord makes a similar point through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 1 verses 10 to 17. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who is required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings.

Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.



Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 was of course a text that Jesus referenced on a couple of key occasions in his ministry recorded in Matthew's gospel. In Matthew chapter 9 verse 13, Jesus answered the Pharisees who accused him of eating with tax collectors and sinners, saying that they needed to learn the meaning of this verse. He again accused the Pharisees of ignorance of the meaning of this statement in Matthew chapter 12 verse 7, after they had accused his disciples of breaking the Sabbath when the disciples had plucked and eaten the heads of grain.

Later in chapter 23 verse he would challenge the scribes and Pharisees in similar terms. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

Above all other things the Lord desires the hearts of his people. No quantity of sacrifices can compensate for the absence of that. The law, whether the sacrificial regulations or the moral requirements of the Ten Commandments, was always to be fulfilled in and through love.

Commentators differ over the meaning of the term Adam in verse 7. Some, observing the participle there later in the verse, argue that it must be a geographical reference relating to a sin committed at a place called Adam. In Joshua chapter 3 verse 16, in connection with the stopping of the waters of the Jordan so that the children of Israel could enter the promised land, there is a place called Adam mentioned. Dierman observes the syntactically similar expression in Hosea chapter 10 verse 9. From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel.

There they have continued. There the reference is clearly to a geographical location. Given the location of the city mentioned in Joshua chapter 3 as the likely site of a river crossing on the border between Ephraim and Gilead, this might make sense.

Like at Adam, they transgressed the covenant. If this is the case, then the reference is an obscure one. But as Dierman argues, it might relate to political intrigue associated with Gilead, such as the 50 men from Gilead that had assisted Pekah in his treacherous murder of Pecahiah, breaking the bond that should have united the people and their ruler.

The fact that Gilead is mentioned in the next verse adds strength to this reading. Another popular reading sees this as a reference back to Adam in the Garden of Eden, breaking the covenant of works. However, as Michael Shepard points out, despite the popularity of expansive uses of the term in both Reformed systematic and biblical

theologies, the term covenant is not actually employed elsewhere in reference to the situation that existed prior to the fall.

It is important to recognize that the term covenant within scripture is deployed much less broadly than it is within systems of so-called covenant theology. While this doesn't mean that we can't use the term covenant in a stipulated sense within our theologies and see the components of such a covenant so defined in Eden, it does mean that we need to be careful not to confuse the senses in which we are using this term. Moon defends the historically popular reading of Adam as a reference to man, whether our first father Adam in particular, or humanity more generally.

There, might relate, he argues, not to a geographical location but to a rhetorical one. Adam is paradigmatic for covenant breaking and later Jewish texts read Hosea chapter 6 verse 7 in this way. Much as we see in the case of Abraham's faithfulness being described as if a fulfillment of the law in Genesis chapter 26 verse 5, language of covenant could appropriately be read back into the story of Eden.

John Goldengate offers something of a mediating reading of this text, suggesting that as the heroes were first listening through it, they might initially have thought of the story of Eden when they heard the name Adam, before it became clearer that it was the place Adam that was in view. He further notes that the association with Adam might recall the first crossing of the Jordan when they had entered the land and dedicated themselves to the Lord, a commitment that they had subsequently broken. While the term Adam might strictly denote the place called Adam then, that place was selected because it also evoked connotations with the solemn commitment to the Lord that they had made at their first entry into the land and also to the treachery of Adam at the first fall of man.

As scripture is a literary text, such connotations can also be aspects of its divinely intended meaning. An overly narrow focus upon revelation as declarative propositions can make us forgetful of this. The description of Gilead as a city of evildoers is possibly a figurative way of characterizing that region of the transjordan more generally.

The priests lying in wait might also be a reference to their involvement in Pekah's treacherous assassination of Pekah Haya and his rebellion more generally. The references here, as Moon emphasises, are general rather than particular and perhaps we should be cautious of tying them too strongly to one historical event. Gilead's treachery was not merely displayed in that one act but it had been functioning as a rival centre of power to Samaria for over a decade.

Israel has become defined by outrageous treachery, by disgraceful infidelity and by shameful defilement and uncleanness. And if Judah thinks that it is innocent in comparison to its wicked brother to the north, it is informed that a harvest time is set for them too. A question to consider, within the Old Testament lore itself, how does the Lord show that steadfast love and knowledge of him is more important than sacrifice? The

first verse of Hosea chapter 7 should be read as continuing the final line of the preceding chapter.

This gives us, When I restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria. There is, as Andrew Dearman argues, a clear parallelism to be observed. When I restore the fortunes of my people goes with, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and when I would heal Israel goes with, and the evil deeds of Samaria.

The Lord would heal his people, however as he turns to restore them they manifest the fact that they have not, and will not, turn back to him. Their rebellion merely flares up again, rebellion most signally evident in the capital of Samaria. Indeed it seems that the Lord's turning to them provokes the disease.

They are a land of bandits raiding outside, and thieves plundering inside. They are unmindful that the Lord remembers all of their evil that is before him. It is not forgotten, and they will be brought to account for what they have done.

Their iniquity is before the Lord's face, and they cannot escape its recompense. Verses 3 to 7 are very difficult to interpret, and several understandings of these verses have been advanced by commentators. Perhaps what is in view is a drunken royal banquet employed by conspirators as an occasion for an assassination.

There were a few assassinations in the Northern Kingdom in the course of Hosea's ministry to which this could possibly refer. These verses contain a series of related metaphors drawn from baking. Baking would be done in a cylindrical clay oven, fed with its fuel at the bottom, with an opening at the top where bread and other items could be put in against the sides.

While one would typically be concerned that a fire not die down, such an oven could easily overheat if unattended, and be unsuitable for baking as a result. The baker is supposed to guard the oven, but in his negligence he allowed things to get dangerously out of hand. In their commentary on the book, Francis Anderson and David Noel Friedman raise the possibility that the baker might refer to the king, or alternatively to someone close to the king, who was responsible for his safety, but who aided the traitors or assassins.

The oven and the bread, for their part, may function as mixed metaphors, both relating to the conspirators in different ways. The image is one of a consuming power, the devouring passions of Israel and the traitors at its heart, a power that has been dangerously untended. As Hans Walter Wolff comments, Israel had four kings overthrown within the period of twelve years leading up to 733 BC, yet despite this extreme instability, they still didn't call upon the Lord.

Metaphors of baking seem to continue in verse 8. Ephraim is mixed with the peoples, like the mixing of dough or ingredients into dough. Likewise, Ephraim is an unturned cake, not having turned to the Lord, and about to burn in consequence. Ephraim's strength, vitality and youthful vigour is sapped by Arameans and Assyrians.

Repeating the words of chapter 5 verse 5, Israel's pride is said to serve as evidence against them before the Lord. They are recalcitrant and impenitent in their rebellion, not turning to seek the Lord's face. In their foreign policy, they are dangerously naive, at one moment calling to Egypt and at another fluttering to Assyria for aid, like a silly dove.

We will return to this image in chapter 11 verse 11. Some see in verse 11 here a possible reference point from which we could date the events being referred to, although it might be referring more generally to imprudent shifts in Israel's foreign policy over many years, as it flitted between the great northern and the great southern powers dominating the region. Wolff suggests that it best fits the period of 733 BC.

Like a silly bird, however, Israel would be snared by the Lord. The second half of verse 12 is unclear. Perhaps it refers to a prophetic word of judgment that was delivered before the assembly of the people.

In verse 13, the prophetic message breaks out in a statement of woe on account of the hastening desolation of Israel due to its rebellion and its refusal to turn. The problem is not on the Lord's side. He would readily redeem them, but they bear false witness about him.

Perhaps their lies are that the Lord won't bring them to account, that he is unmindful of their sins. In their trouble and for their provision, they turn not to the Lord but to the Baals. They cut themselves like pagans, seeking grain and wine from false gods of fertility, but do not call out to the Lord.

The Lord had given Israel its strength, raising him as his son, but Israel had turned its strength against the Lord. Israel is treacherous and dangerously so, like an unreliable bow. However, their sins would come back upon their own heads.

Perhaps their treachery, displayed in the breaking of a treaty with the suzerain, would be the occasion of the judgment described here. The chapter ends with the derision of Egypt. Israel had been delivered from Egypt in the exodus, but now they would either be returned to Egypt in judgment or would be ridiculed by them.

A question to consider. In this chapter we see the moral corruption and treachery in Israel's heart, shown in its behavior before the Lord, but also expressed in its internal life as a nation and in its foreign policy. What are some of the dynamics by which a rebellious posture towards the Lord can also play itself out in treachery towards our neighbours? Hosea chapter 8 is a chapter in which Israel is trying in all sorts of futile

ways to secure itself in uncertain times.

The chapter opens with the blowing of an alarm. The house of the Lord, here referring to the people of Israel, not specifically the temple, are under immediate threat. A great and powerful eagle, not a vulture as in some translations, is hovering over it.

We should think here of an image similar to that of Ezekiel chapter 17, with the eagles of Babylon and Egypt coming to take from the land. This mighty and irresistible force is nearly upon them, and yet they seem to be insensible to their danger, needing to be roused to action. The real threat, of course, is the Lord himself who is bringing disaster upon them, because they have transgressed his covenant and rebelled against his law.

However, they presumptuously assume that they know the Lord. They fancy that they are worshipping the Lord when they are worshipping their idols. Yet as they have spurned the good, they will be pursued by the enemy.

The enemy here is presumably the Assyrians. Given the most likely time of this prophecy, in the late 730s BC, around 732 or 731, the years leading up to this time had been filled with coups and overthrown kings. The ruling house of Israel changed on a number of occasions and it lurched from one sort of foreign policy to another.

The kings of Israel weren't appointed by the Lord. They had rejected the Davidic king in the south, and just about all of their kings was a rebel against his predecessor. Beyond this string of traitors turned kings, Israel sought security in the worship of idols.

With silver and gold, they fashioned idols for their high places, which they worshipped while abandoning the Lord to their own destruction. In 1 Kings chapter 12, after the split in the kingdom, Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, had set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan, proclaiming these to be the gods that had brought Israel out of Egypt. He instructed the people to worship them, hoping that the people would not go south to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, worried that the pull of that cultic center might compromise the loyalty of his subjects.

When worshipping this calf, many of the people would have fancied that they were worshipping the Lord. Yet the Lord had utterly rejected the calf of Samaria. It would be destroyed, broken into pieces, while Jeroboam I and his successors on the throne of Israel had proclaimed it to be the God of Israel.

It was merely the work of a craftsman, and no god at all. They had turned to the Baals and other false gods for fertility. However, the result was that the land was becoming barren.

They sowed the wind, casting forth from hands empty of seed, and they reaped the whirlwind, destruction and devastation. Even what would grow would be fruitless, standing grain having no heads, and yielding no flower. Besides, even if it were to yield

any fruit, what it yielded would be eaten by strangers.

Israel is already a non-entity among the nations. For all of Israel's efforts to secure itself through foreign policy, through idolatry or through the latest coup, it has all proved futile, and the nation is gradually dissolving. Like a wild and ornery beast, Israel has turned to the Assyrians for aid.

They have paid large sums in tribute, hoping to gain some relief for themselves, not realizing that their true enemy and opponent is the Lord himself. Until they come to terms with him, they will find no respite from a human source. Going up to Assyria like a wild donkey wandering alone probably refers to the foreign policy of Israel.

Following Hoshea's assassination of his predecessor Pekah, Israel would soon find itself handed over to the most burdensome of tribute. On account of its rebellion, Ephraim's entire cultic system was rotten and inoperative. They had multiplied altars for sinning, establishing many high places and cultic sites in the land contrary to the word of the Lord, all designed, at least in theory, to deal with sin.

And yet these sites for dealing with sin had become further occasions for sin. They had become utterly alienated from the word of the Lord. If the Lord were to multiply his laws a thousand times over, intense repetition would still be insufficient to overcome the foreignness of the word of the Lord to this rebellious people.

They offer and eat peace offerings, and yet the Lord does not accept them. They fancy that they have communion with him, but what they have is not fellowship at all. What they fancy will lead to their sins being forgotten actually brings their sins to mind.

The ultimate curse of the covenant would soon come upon them. Their sins would be brought to mind. They would be judged, removed from the land, and returned to Egypt from where they had been first taken.

Israel and Judah also sought their security in building walled cities, fortifications and strongholds. The Lord, however, would overthrow them all, setting a fire upon their cities and devouring their strongholds, leaving them as defenceless prey for the nations, stripped of their glory and of their strength. A question to consider.

At the beginning of this chapter, Israel insists that they know the Lord, yet we discover that they are offering peace offerings that are not accepted by the Lord. They are worshipping the Lord with idols in ways that brings them under his judgment. They are building altars for dealing with sin and actually compounding their sin.

While they fancy that they are worshipping the Lord, what they are doing is worse than vain. They are making their situation worse. How could they have undertaken the worship of the Lord in a manner in which they would be assured that they would be heard and accepted by the Lord? Hosea chapter 9 begins with words that seem to evoke

a summons to a feast.

However, rather than being summoned to celebrate a feast, Israel is being commanded not to do so. The feast in question seems to be a great harvest festival. Israel had turned to the bales for its fertility, and the threshing floor was the site where they presumed that they received their payment.

The threshing floor might also be a site associated with prostitution more generally. However, the source of the fertility of the land was always the Lord and the Lord alone. As Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord, the land would become barren to them.

The places where grain and grapes were gathered in and prepared would no longer provide for them. The blessing of new wine would be cut off, and in addition to the cutting off of the blessings of the land, Israel itself would be cut off from the land. As a nation, they had turned for support to Assyria and Egypt, and they would end up going to Assyria and Egypt in exile as they were expelled from the land of the Lord's promise.

Rather than eating the fruits of the Lord's land, they would eat unclean food in Assyria. Cut off from the place of the Lord's special blessing, they would be eating the food of the Gentiles. What is referred to here is not primarily non-kosher food, but the food eaten by those who are cut off from the fellowship of the people of God.

This becomes clearer in verse 4. They won't be pouring out drink offerings of wine to the Lord. They won't be enjoying fellowship with the Lord in the eating of sacrificial meals. Rather, they will be like mourners, who, because of their association with the dead, are unclean and cannot enter into fellowship with the congregation.

Their food might sustain them in their hunger, but they would enjoy neither fellowship with the Lord nor with his people as they ate it. They will be cut off from the celebration of the feasts of the land. Maybe this is a reference in verse 5 to the feasts more generally, or perhaps it's a more narrow reference to the feast of tabernacles or in gathering.

Rather than celebrating the feasts of the land, they are fleeing the destruction that is coming upon the land and going into the hands of Egypt. They would end up dying in Egyptian cities. We might recall the curses of the covenant in places like Deuteronomy chapter 28, where the climax of the curses is their being returned to Egypt, the land from which the Lord had first delivered them.

They are experiencing an antiextus, a reversal of the Lord's earlier deliverance. Their possessions and precious things, the things that they had once treasured, will be given over to thorns and to weeds. All of this would occur as the day of Israel's reckoning came upon it.

The second half of verse 7 and verse 8 are very difficult to understand, and several

competing interpretations have been advanced for them. Joshua Moon suggests that the words here are the words of Hosea's opponents. He paraphrases them as follows.

This Hosea is a fool. He's mad, talking about the greatness of your sin and the greatness of your hatred. Ephraim stands a century with my God.

Hosea sets traps for all Ephraim sets out to do. He brings hatred into God's household. John Goldengate, by contrast, sees the words here as the words of Hosea himself.

Hosea sees himself as compelled to play the fool. He's driven mad by the people's unfaithfulness. In verse 8, he's describing his duty as a prophet in ways that might remind us of Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 17.

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. Goldengate suggests that Hosea's contemporaries might be speaking dismissively about his God, which might explain Hosea's reference to my God here.

His task as the watchman is to warn the land of approaching danger coming from the Lord himself. The Lord is like a fowler who has set a snare for the people, and unless they respond in a way that will allow them to escape it, they will be trapped and destroyed. Francis Anderson and David Noel Friedman talk about the way that these sorts of dismissive statements can be seen elsewhere in scripture, in places like Amos chapter 7 or in 2 Kings chapter 9 verse 11.

There Jehu responds to a query about the prophet who had visited him. Is all well, why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, you know the fellow and his talk. Anderson and Friedman suggest that the fowler's snare is not the snare that the Lord has set for the people, but rather the snare that the people have set for Hosea.

The corruption of the people is compared with the story of Gibeah. In the concluding chapters of the book of Judges from chapter 19 onwards, the tragic story of Gibeah and its sin are told. That sin led to a deep breach in the people and the near extinction of the tribe of Benjamin.

The sin itself was similar to the sin of Sodom, a sin that represented the extremes of wickedness of the people of the land. The rest of the verses of the chapter, from verse 10 to 17, probably represent a distinct section. Within these verses the Lord recalls several episodes in the earlier history of the nation.

In verse 10 we have a sense of the joy that the Lord once had over his people and the way that he nurtured them. However, his care and love for the people was responded to by an act of deep betrayal. Their fathers were like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, something that would have been greeted with joy as a promise of later fruitfulness.



However, in the events described in Numbers chapter 25, Israel had played the whore and bound itself to bale appeal, forsaking the Lord and also intermarrying with pagan Moabite women. For their sin they would face an utter end. Their glory would utterly forsake them, flying away like a bird.

Israel would wither down into its very roots. There would be no birth, there would be no pregnancy that would yield a birth, and there would be no conception that would yield a pregnancy, even if the judgment of verse 11 did not hang over them. And they did bring children to birth.

They would swiftly be bereaved of those children until there would be none left. In verse 11 it spoke of the glory of Ephraim flying away like a bird. In verse 12, woe to them when I depart from them.

The Lord is the glory of his people and he's about to forsake Israel. Ephraim's beginnings were auspicious, lovingly planted in a meadow in the very best conditions. But now the nation has fallen so far that its children will be led out to the slaughter.

What could the Lord give to his people in such a situation? Perhaps the most that he can give them is a mitigation of the cruelty that they will face at the hand of the Assyrians. If only they had a miscarrying womb and dry breasts, they would not be bringing up children only to see them brutally slain before their eyes by the Assyrians. That at least would be a small mercy.

The reason for the reference to Gilgal in verse 15 is unclear. What exactly was it that caused the Lord to begin to hate them there? Gilgal was the place where Israel first entered the land in the story of Joshua. Perhaps the point is that from the very first entry to the land, they were engaged in the sort of unfaithfulness that was finally leading to their destruction at this point.

Gilgal was also the site where Saul was made king, which might be another way in which it was associated with transgression. Anderson and Friedman note the contrast between the description of the evil of theirs being found in Gilgal and the Lord finding Israel like grapes in the wilderness in verse 10. While Meir Gruber and others focused upon the monarchy started with Saul, Anderson and Friedman, among others, focused upon the practice of Baal worship in Gilgal.

They quote from the book of Amos, chapter 4 verse 4, come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgression, or to Amos chapter 5 verses 4 to 5, but do not seek Bethel and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba, for Gilgal shall surely go into exile and Bethel shall come to nothing. As in the message of Amos, Hosea declares that they are going to be expelled from the house of the Lord. The claim that all of their princes are rebels might refer not only to the ways that the princes have rebelled against the Lord, but also to the ways that the rulers of Israel had, one after another, rebelled

against their predecessors.

They were a bunch of assassins and revolutionaries, people who had staged coups, rather than legitimate and righteous rulers. Returning to the points of verse 11 and 12, in verse 16 the point is repeated, the root of Ephraim is dried up and they will bear no fruit. As in verse 12, so in verse 16, even if they were to give birth, the children would be put to death.

On account of their rebellion and the rejection of the Lord, they will be cast out and made wanderers among the nations. A question to consider, within this chapter, fruit or offspring play a number of different roles. They can be signs of blessing or promise or the objects of judgment.

What are some of the ways that the metaphor of fruit can help us to understand the people's relationship to the Lord, the people's relationship to their works, and the Lord's relationship to their works? Hosea chapter 10 begins with the image of Israel as a vine, an image familiar from places like Psalm 80 and Isaiah chapter 5. Translators and commentators differ over the type of vine it's being described as. For some, including the ESV, it is described as a luxuriant vine. Others, like John Goldengay, argue that it is a wasted or a ravaged vine.

Meir Gruber raises the intriguing possibility that it might be an auto-antonym, a word like cleave or dust that can be used to mean its opposite. Cleave meaning to hold fast to something, but also to cut something off from something else. Or dust to remove dust, or dust in the sense of covering something with dust, like icing sugar on a cake.

Such a play with double meaning here might capture something of Israel's contrariness. The more that it prospers, the more that its disease accelerates. As Israel's fruit multiplied, he multiplied his altars.

As the country improved, he improved his pillars. The wealth and the prosperity of the land that the Lord has given it was channeled into its unfaithfulness. The consequence of this would soon come upon them.

The Lord would break down the altars and destroy the pillars, both of them signs of the people's unfaithfulness. In verse 3, Hosea represents the people as denying that they have a king. This might refer to a time when the king is taken away from them, as Hosea is removed by Shalmaneser V, for instance.

Alternatively, the first reference to the king might also be a way of speaking about the rejection of the Lord, Hosea giving voice to the treacherous heart of the people. As he has done in preceding chapters, Hosea describes the people as treacherous and false. They do not keep their vows.

They make covenants that they do not keep. They betray both their own kings and

foreign suzerains. As a consequence, the judgments of the Lord afflict the land like poisonous weeds in a field.

Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, had set up a golden calf in Bethel, which had caused Israel to sin. Now the calf of Bethel would be removed and the people and the priests would mourn its departure. Beth-Avon seems to be a disphemism.

A disphemism is the opposite of a euphemism. A disphemism is a word that is used instead of a neutral or a positive term to communicate a derogatory or negative sense. Bethel means house of God.

Beth-Avon means house of wickedness or vanity. Israel would be stripped of this great idol, which would be sent to Assyria. Samaria's king would likewise be removed.

The high places of Avon, in apposition with the sin of Israel, would be destroyed. They would be given over to Thorn and Thistle, symbolic of the curse. And what we should probably presume are the altars would call to the mountains and the hills to cover and fall upon them.

Jesus uses similar language to express the sentiment of people on the day of judgment. In Luke chapter 23 verse 30, we also see similar language in Revelation chapter 6 verses 15 to 17. One of the most dramatic and significant sins of Israel was at Gibeah.

The actions of the men in Gibeah in Judges chapter 19 followed the pattern of the men of Sodom in Genesis chapter 19. The sin of Sodom had precipitated the annihilation of the cities of the plain. In the case of the city of Gibeah, it led to a sanguinary war in which the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out.

As Israel took on the character of the Canaanites who had once inhabited the land, they suffered the fate of the Canaanites. Israel is warned of a similar judgment here. Their destruction would come not at the hand of their brothers but at the hands of the nations that would be gathered against them.

Some have seen the double iniquity referred to in verse 10 as a reference to the sin of the war against Gibeah in addition to the sin of Gibeah that led to the war. Others have seen this as a possible reference to Israel being paid double for its sins. Both of these readings seem to be unlikely to me.

A likelier explanation is that it refers to the two golden calves that were set up by Jeroboam I, one in Dan and another in Bethel. The golden calf of Bethel has already been referred to in verses 5 and 6 and the verses that follow also explore calf imagery. Ephraim is compared to a trained calf.

We see similar imagery in Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 18. I have heard Ephraim grieving. You have disciplined me and I was disciplined.

Like an untrained calf, bring me back that I may be restored for you are the Lord my God. The image here in Hosea is of a formerly cooperative and docile calf that has later become stubborn, uncooperative and wayward. Perhaps the love referred to here is Ephraim's former love of threshing, the work of the Lord that had been given to it.

Alternatively, Francis Anderson and David Noel Friedman argue that the love refers to God's love for Ephraim, not Ephraim's love for the threshing. The image of an animal given the task of working the land connects the people with the land that the Lord had entrusted to their care. The threshing floor where grain was prepared and chaff was removed was also connected with the temple which was built on the site of the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Israel formerly hadn't needed any restraint. It was willing and responsive and enjoyed a corresponding freedom. However, as it matured in its rebellion, it would be put under a harness.

The end of verse 11 brings together Ephraim, Judah and Jacob, the father of both. Perhaps we are to envision two beasts yoked together working upon the land. Even after the division of the kingdom, Israel and Judah still bound up together.

The three successive related statements, I will put Ephraim to the yoke, Judah must plough, Jacob must harrow for himself, have a symmetry with the threefold statement of the beginning of the next verse, sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground. Although farmers, rather than their animals, are in view in the second set of images, they share in common an underlying agricultural reference. Israel within the land is like a farmer working the land to bring forth those covenant virtues that the Lord desires.

As they sow righteousness, they will reap steadfast love. Hosea gives the example of fallow ground that needs to be prepared for use. We see a similar image in Jeremiah chapter 4 verse 3. As Israel responds to the Lord's charge here, they will enjoy his reigns of righteousness upon them.

The fertility of the land is here compared with the covenant relationship between the Lord and his people. However, although Israel was charged to sow righteousness, to reap steadfast love, and break up their fallow ground, in fact, as verse 13 tells us, they had ploughed iniquity, had reaped injustice, and had eaten the fruit of lies. Rejecting the word of the Lord and his commandments, they had trusted instead in military might.

This confidence, however, would be brought to nothing. The reference to the destruction of Shalman at Beth Arbel in verse 14 has provoked a lot of different theories among the commentators. Joshua Moon suggests that Shalman is a reference to Shalmaneser V and Beth Arbel is the site of an Assyrian atrocity.

This, however, would require a very late date for the prophecy of Hosea here, likely in the last three or four years of the nation of Israel. Golden Gaze suggests it might be a reference to the town of Arbela in Galilee, and one of the Assyrian kings called Shalmaneser, although we don't know which one. Alternatively, it might be a reference to a Moabite king, Salamannu, and a town across the Jordan.

Andrew Dearman also relates it to a northern Transjordanian city, including the possibility that it might have been an atrocity committed in the reign of Shalmaneser III over a century prior to the time of Hosea's prophecy. Hans Walter Wolff mentions another conjecture, the killing of Zachariah by Shalem the usurper. Gruber raises the intriguing possibility that Shalman might not actually be the perpetrator of the atrocity in this verse, rather he might be its victim.

Following Oded Tammuz, he connects it with the rebellion against Shalmaneser III that had been in Arbela, one of the key cultic centres of the nation of Assyria. The point of the prophet here then would be that the king is trusting in his army and yet conflict would arise from his own people. His army would turn against him and he would suffer the same fate as Shalmaneser III had suffered in Arbela.

However, all of these remain conjectures. We have no clear answer to the identity of Beth Arbela or of the character of Shalman here. A question to consider, in more concrete terms, what might it involve to sow righteousness, to reap steadfast love, and to break up your fallow ground? Hosea chapter 11 is one of the most poignant and well-known chapters in the book, not least because verse 1 is quoted in Matthew chapter 2 verse 15 in reference to Jesus' sojourn in Egypt with his parents as a child.

The question of whether this section closely relates to the one preceding it will help us to determine whether we should render the first clause as temporal, when Israel was a child, or causal, for Israel was a child. Although Joshua Moon argues for the latter causal understanding, most other commentators adopt the temporal understanding. Jerry Huang hears both senses.

Judgment will come because Israel is the Lord's son. But the verse also recalls the specific time of the Exodus and the love of the Lord for Israel, his son, demonstrated within it. The story of the Exodus is a story of the Lord's dealing with Israel, his firstborn son.

Exodus chapter 4 verse 22, thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son. The Lord brought his son out of the womb of Egypt in the Passover and in the deliverance at the Red Sea. Israel was then swaddled, nursed and led through the wilderness, being taught how to walk.

Verse 2 is variously understood. Huang reads it as they, Israel, called to them, Egypt. Then they, Israel, went away from them, toward Assyria.

This reading would recall chapter 7 verse 11, where we see the same pair of verbs used. Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria. John Goldingay reads it similarly.

Hans Walter Wolf and Moon, however, read it as a reference to the call of the Lord to Israel that Israel rejects. However, although this is the reading of the Septuagint, it requires an argument for the corruption of the text at this point, as the pronouns are plural here, they and them, not he or I. Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman argue that if Israel was in view here, given the personification of Israel as a son in the first verse, we might expect singular third-person pronouns, but they are plural. That said, both the subject and the object here are third-person plural.

Anderson and Freedman translate the line, they called to them, they departed from me, suggesting that it might be a more general reference to surrounding peoples tempting Israel to apostasy, as in places like Numbers 25 and the rebellion with Baal Appeal. This might fit more with the second half of the verse, as Israel gave himself to persistent idolatry with the Baals. Recalling the tenderest years of his firstborn son, we are given a sense of the delight of the Lord in his beloved child and his concern for his growth and prospering.

However, we also get a sense of the pain caused by the treachery of the ungrateful son, who rewards the care and compassion of his father with infidelity, rebellion and betrayal, utterly unmindful of all that his father did for him throughout his youth. The Lord taught Ephraim how to walk. In loving care and condescension, he took them up in his arms, granting them protection, deliverance and healing.

Perhaps we should think of some more specific events or actions that might be evoked by these images or metaphors. For instance, teaching Ephraim to walk might make us think of the way that the Lord taught Israel the law, so that they might walk in freedom. The Lord saved Israel with his mighty arm and guided Israel in the wilderness.

Elsewhere, in places like Jeremiah chapter 2, Hosea chapter 2 verses 14 to 15 and Ezekiel chapter 16, the same early years of Israel's time in the wilderness are recalled, although in those places Israel is characterized as the bride, not the son as he is here. Verse 4 shifts to a different metaphor of a farmer tending to his laboring animal, loosening the animal's yoke so that it could eat freely. However, despite all of the kindness that the Lord showed to Israel his son, they had refused to return to him.

Considering that Hosea elsewhere speaks of Israel returning to Egypt, reading verse 5 as a statement that Israel will not return to the land of Egypt, as the ESV does for instance, raises questions of apparent contradiction. Moon reads it as a rhetorical question. Shall they not return to the land of Egypt? Andrew Dearman raises the possibility that, where return to Egypt is mentioned elsewhere, it is not literally Egypt that is in view.

Egypt rather stands for the state of bondage which they will experience under the yoke of Assyria. Their return to Egypt is contrasted with their refusal to return to the Lord, and also probably looks back to the beginning of the chapter where the Lord first called them from Egypt. They would suffer the consequences of their own stubborn folly.

Their own councils would lead them to destruction, to war coming upon them and their cities being violently overthrown. As they had rejected and turned away from the Lord, if they were to turn back to him in the time of their distress, the Lord would not raise them up again. At this point however, the Lord breaks out in a statement of the greatest pathos.

It will not be their final end. It will not mark the conclusion of his dealings with them. His voice will still call to them while they are in exile.

Adma and Zeboim were two of the less famous cities of the plain, along with Sodom and Gomorrah. While the nation of Israel would be overthrown, the Lord would not make a final destruction of them in the way that he did with the cities of the plain. He is bound to his people in deep compassion.

Even as they're stubbornly and egregiously rebelling against him, his heart still yearns in compassion for his wayward son. On various other occasions in scripture where we see the Lord asserting his deity, it is in reference to the certainty and the power of his judgement. Here however, the deity of God is demonstrated in his mercy and grace for his rebellious son.

Even the most loving human father would have given up on Israel long ago. Yet Israel's stubborn persistence in rebellion is only outmatched by the Lord's stubborn persistence in his mercy. Earlier in chapter 7 verse 11, Israel was described as like a silly dove going towards Egypt and Assyria.

Now however, when the Lord roars like a lion, his children will return to him from Egypt and Assyria like trembling birds. The trembling suggests that those that return will have finally learned to fear the Lord. The Lord would once more give those who returned a home within his land.

Verse 12, the final verse of the chapter, should probably be read more with what The second half of it does present problems. The term used is not usually used in a positive sense and in a few verses time Judah will be spoken of quite negatively. The claim that Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One might be something of a stretch.

Moons suggests that we understand it as follows. Judah still strives with God, with the Holy One, who is faithful. The faithfulness here is not Judah's but the Lord's.

A question to consider. Matthew quotes verse 1 of this chapter in chapter 2 verse 15 of his gospel. There he claims that the word of the prophet is fulfilled in Jesus coming from

Egypt.

How might we connect Israel as God's son called from Egypt to the story of Christ as God's son in Matthew's gospel? Hosea chapter 12 is a rich and densely elusive chapter. Challenging to understand, it draws extensively upon the story of the patriarchs and the exodus. A passage that uses a number of word plays, it provides Israel with the archetypal patriarchal narrative as an interpretive foil for its current situation.

Ephraim has proved fickle and deceitful in its foreign alliances and also in its own social and political life. It had vacillated between Assyria and Egypt and would end up suffering on account of its treachery. Verse 2 introduces another controversy that the Lord has with Judah or Jacob.

The destiny and identity of the nation is seen to be contained in its forefather. In a moment of crisis it will be in part through looking at their forefather Jacob that they will get their bearings again. As Joshua Moon notes, the two events that are focused upon in verse 3 are the events in which Jacob received his names.

In both of the cases the text of Hosea puns upon the names. Taking by the heel at the beginning of verse 3 plays upon the name Jacob and at the beginning of verse 4 as Andrew Dearman notes, there is a word play on the word Israel with the verbal phrase that opens the In the patriarchal narrative of Genesis, the names of Jacob are a very important part of the story. Throughout Jacob's life he's seeking for a name and a blessing.

Originally he lacks the blessing as the second born and the name that he first receives is an unflattering one that connects him with deception. It is in his struggle with the angel at the Ford of the Jabbok, not coincidentally a place where the letters of Jacob's name are mixed up, that he finally receives a new name and is blessed by the angel. In Genesis chapter 32 verse 28 he receives this name.

Then he said, your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed. Of the two events in verse 3, one relates to the time of his birth and the other relates to a time when he was a grown man. Among commentators there are many different readings of the clauses of verse 4. Francis Anderson and David Noel Freedman translate verses 3 and 4 as follows.

Hans Walter Wolff reads it quite differently. John Goldengay sees the weeping and seeking for favour as a reference to Jacob seeking a blessing from the angel. Dwayne Garrett observes a chiasmic structure to these statements and he also observes the ways that the two names are coded into the text.

The second clause of verse 4 refers back to the first clause of verse 3. In the womb he tripped up his brother relates to he wept and sought his favour. This then has in view



Genesis chapter 33 verses 3 to 4 and 10 to 11, the account of Jacob's meeting He himself went on before them bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother. But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept.

Jacob said, Connecting the second clause of verse 4 with the reunion of Jacob and Esau rounds off the rough account of the story of Jacob. Jacob is a man defined by struggling but after wrestling with the Lord and prevailing he is no longer wrestling with his brother Esau in the same way. They're reconciled.

The prophecy now alludes to a further event in the life of Jacob or perhaps two events. And then it relates it very powerfully to the experience of Israel in the present day. In Genesis chapter 28 Jacob met with the Lord at Bethel.

He saw the vision of the ladder ascending to heaven and marked the place out as the place of the Lord's dwelling. The Lord had spoken to him there and made a promise in Genesis chapter 28 verse 15. Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

This is later referred to on the return journey in chapter 32 verses 9 to 10. And Jacob said, These statements seem to be alluded to in verse 6. This connection drawn between the current nation of Israel and the historical forebear and namesake Israel or Jacob is first explicitly presented at the end of verse 4. He met God at Bethel and there God spoke with us. Verse 5 also seems to bring in an allusion to Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush in Exodus chapters 3 and 4. There the Lord declared his covenant name to Moses and here it is the covenant or the memorial name of God that is highlighted.

Already we could probably think of a number of ways in which these allusions might connect with the current life of Israel. Israel in the book of Hosea is defined by deception and deceit much as the earlier life of Jacob. The site of Bethel has also been prominent throughout the book of Hosea as a site of idolatry.

The place where Jeroboam the son of Nebat set up the golden calf that caused Israel to sin. This central site of idolatry however was the place where the Lord first met with Jacob. Furthermore in Genesis chapter 35 Jacob was called back to Bethel where he rededicated himself and his household to the Lord and they put away their foreign gods.

There the Lord also reiterated the changing of Jacob's name to Israel. A further play on a word is seen in verse 7 where Israel is described as a merchant. That word for merchant derives from the word Canaan.

Israel it is being suggested has become like the Canaanites that they once dispossessed.

Ephraim however is boastful in his wealth. He wrongly fancies that no one can prove any guilt against him.

The word that is used for wealth here is the same word that is used of Jacob's manhood back in verse 3. Other translations of that verse translate it as vigor or wealth. Perhaps we might hear behind this the story of Jacob who prospered while serving under Laban in Haran and whose wealth was there closely scrutinized for theft and false dealing. The Israel of Hosea's day presumed that like their forefather they would not be found guilty of false dealing even while it was engaging in theft, deception and oppression.

The Lord's history with Israel had extended over many years. He had spoken throughout their history by the prophets giving them visions and messages for his people. He had brought them out of Egypt, an event commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles where they would dwell in tents.

The Lord could return them to tents once more. There was another wilderness, the wilderness of exile awaiting them. Verse 11 refers to Gilead and Gilgal again.

Gilead was mentioned earlier in chapter 6 verse 8. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. And then Gilgal was mentioned in chapter 9 verse 15. Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal.

There I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more.

All their princes are rebels. One of the events in the story of Jacob that might have had particular resonance in the days of Hosea would be the story of chapter 31 as Jacob fled from Laban. Laban pursued him and overtook him at Gilead.

There Jacob and his house were inspected for the stolen household gods. And more importantly a treaty was made between Jacob and Laban. A treaty of peace witnessed to by a pile of stones.

However Israel and the Arameans had been at war for much of the past century. Gilgal was also the site of a pile of stones set up by Joshua in Joshua chapter 4 as a testimony to the Lord's bringing of Israel across the Jordan. However now as these places, Gilead and Gilgal, had like Bethel, become sites synonymous with sin and rebellion, the curses of the covenant would come down upon them.

In speaking of their altars at these sites like stone heaps, the Lord is probably alluding to these earlier heaps of stones that bore testimony against the people when they broke the covenant. He might also be suggesting that the altars will be torn down. Such unfaithful altars are little more than impediments.

They are like large stones in a field that a farmer is trying to plough. A further connection

with the story of Jacob is brought out in verses 12 and 13. There the Lord relates Jacob's sojourn in the land of Aram with Laban with the exodus from Egypt.

There are numerous parallels between these stories to be observed. In both cases a group prospers as they are reduced to a state of servitude. In both cases they leave and are pursued.

In both cases an exceedingly significant event occurs at the crossing of the waters. In the story of the exodus, the deliverance at the Red Sea. In the story of Jacob, the wrestling at the Jabbok where he receives a new name and a blessing.

The parallel here foregrounds the figure of the prophet. Obviously drawing our minds back to verse 10, I spoke to the prophets it was I who multiplied visions and through the prophets gave parables. The Lord deals with his people through the prophets.

The prophetic office represents a continual thread of God addressing and guiding his people. The parallels between the two statements should be observed. Jacob after fleeing to Aram labored for a wife and guarded sheep for a wife.

The Lord through the agency of his prophet Moses brought Israel up from Egypt and guarded Israel. Perhaps what the Lord is doing here is drawing a parallel between Jacob who labored for his wife for Laban and his own labor for Israel in Egypt. Israel is supposed to be the bride of the Lord.

She owes him her faithfulness. In verse 14 we have the final indictment. Ephraim is found guilty.

Its blood guilt will not be removed from it. It will suffer the consequence of its sins. A question to consider.

Can you think of other occasions in scripture where people are encouraged to look back on previous narratives and to interpret their own experience against the foil of those stories? The beginning of Hosea chapter 13 harkens back to a time when Ephraim was elevated among his brothers. Ephraim the second son of Joseph who was raised above his brother Manasseh was the son who most represented Joseph's part within the nation. If the power of the south was Judah the power of the north was Joseph and particularly Ephraim.

However this once great tribe brought destruction upon itself. He incurred guilt through Baal and died. Joshua Moon suggests that the death in question here is the end of the house of Ahab, the destruction of the Amrites who had particularly given themselves to the worship of the Baals.

Alternatively we might see in this the downfall of Hosea. However even after such a downfall they continued to compound their sin making for themselves metal images. The

metal images referred to here which are made out of silver are presumably not the same as the golden calf of Bethel set up by Jeroboam the first, the son of Nebat.

Rather these might be gods for household shrines or alternatively gods on high places. In a point typical of prophetic critique of idolatry Hosea points out that these are all the work of craftsmen. These creations of human artisans are completely unfitting to represent the creator God who has created all things.

Verse 1 speaks of Israel's death. In verse 3 they are compared to a morning mist or dew that vanishes early. Or like the chaff from the threshing floor.

They will not endure as the sun rises or as the wind comes. They will disappear or be driven away. Although they have gone after strange gods, God reminds them in verses 4 and 5 of the relationship, the long-standing relationship that he had with them as his people.

He was the God who brought them up out of Egypt and led them in the wilderness providing for them there. At that time of their greatest weakness and dependency he was the one providing for them. They know no other God in such a manner.

No God who has guided, delivered, protected and supported them as he has. It is precisely in this intimate knowledge that existed between the Lord and his people that the tragedy and the betrayal of their going after other gods is most clearly seen. The imagery at this point is imagery that is implicitly that of shepherding.

The Lord shepherded his people. He brought them like a flock out of Egypt and into the promised land where he gave them good pasturage. However, when this flock had grazed and become full they neglected and forgot the Lord who had brought them up.

The warning of forgetting the Lord at the time of fullness and plenty is one that is familiar in various parts of the Bible, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 10 to 14. And you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes which I command you today. Lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied that your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery. As they forget the Lord, however, the Lord who was once their shepherd becomes like their predator.

Another description of the Lord as a predator is found earlier in the book of Hosea in chapter 5 verse 14. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away.

I will carry off and no one shall rescue. The final word of verse 7 in the Hebrew, translated as keep watch or lurk or in Moon's translation as well trodden, is a play upon the word for Assyria. As in the preceding chapter, puns give a clue about certain connections.

Here the agency of the Lord's destruction will come upon his people through Assyria. The Lord is compared to a leopard or lion. He is also compared to a she-bear robbed of her cubs.

The image of the she-bear is not just an image of violence and predation. Rather the she-bear is a violent beast that has been bereft of something most precious to her. In comparing the Lord with a she-bear, we might think of the way in which Israel has been taken from the Lord by her unfaithfulness and the Baals as perhaps being akin to the cubs that have been taken from the she-bear.

They've rejected the Lord and put their trust in their king and also in various foreign policies. However, one by one their kings were overthrown by others and their fickle foreign policy brought destruction upon their head as they vacillated between Egypt and Assyria. Verse 10 might speak to a time after Shalmaneser V removed Hoshea from the throne.

The king has failed, the foreign policy has failed, the Baals have failed and now they have to deal with the Lord who is opposing them like a lion or a she-bear robbed of her cubs. In this context of the loss of the king, rulers and princes, the Lord recalls the initial sinful request of Israel to have a king like the nations. The Lord was Israel's king but in 1 Samuel they rejected the Lord as their king and sought a man over them instead.

Now the consequences of their sinful rebellion in which they took their cues from the surrounding nations and sought a king like them rather than trusting in the Lord as their king has led to a point where the Lord who first gave them that king has left them bereft of a king and the surrounding nations are preying upon them. The imagery of verse 12 might relate to a situation where evidence was gathered together in a bundle ready for a trial. Ephraim will have to give an account for itself and a sentence will be passed against it.

Imagery of the pangs of childbirth are found elsewhere in scripture. In Isaiah chapter 26 verses 17 to 19. Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord.

We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy, for your Jew is a Jew of light, and the

earth will give birth to the dead. In Isaiah chapter 66 verses 7 to 9. Before she was in labor, she gave birth. Before her pain came upon her, she delivered a son.

Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth, says the Lord? Shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb, says your God? Here the image seems to present Ephraim as the child that does not know the proper time. Ephraim is the child whose time has come to be born, and he does not present himself at the opening of the womb.

Perhaps he's stillborn and the nation is going to miscarry. Birth pangs are elsewhere in scripture connected with times of suffering. At some points in scripture, such as in the story of the Exodus, birth pangs herald a new birth.

At other points, however, labor pains arrive, but no child is born. Jeremiah also uses such imagery in his prophecy. As the judgment comes upon Jerusalem, she is like a woman in labor, but no child would be born from her pain.

Verse 14 is famously used by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. In its original context, however, it's far from clear that the meaning is positive. The majority of commentators seem to understand its statements as rhetorical questions.

Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? The implied answer in both cases is no. The Lord is not going to deliver his people from these great enemies. He's going to give them over to the power of death, as we see elsewhere in the prophecy.

What's more, not only is God not going to save his people from these forces, he's going to summon these forces against them. Oh death, where are your plagues? Oh Sheol, where is your stink? is an invitation to death and Sheol to come on the scene with all their terrors. They will be the executioners of Ephraim, enacting the dreadful sentence of the Lord upon his rebellious people.

Such a reading of the text here is certainly not universal. There are several commentators and translations that give the text here a more positive meaning. However, the final clause of the verse does make this difficult.

Compassion is hidden from my eyes. The people are condemned. The nation is going to be slain and buried in the lands of its exile.

When Paul refers to this statement in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it seems most likely to me that he's taking this statement, laden as it is with the darkest themes of judgment, and showing how the light of the Lord's redemption from slavery and the grave is fulfilled in the story of Christ's resurrection. He connects it with the text of Isaiah chapter 25

verse 8. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken.

The final text reads as follows in verses 54 to 57 of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Words that were once a summons to these powers, to slay a people that had broken the law, are now words of triumph over these powers, as they have been robbed of their mastery by Christ's resurrection. Earlier in the chapter, the Lord had spoken of himself as the one who knew Israel in the wilderness.

Here, however, at the end of the chapter, he talks about returning Israel and its land to the state of a wilderness. A question to consider, this chapter gives a very negative portrayal of Israel's history with its kings. I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath.

However, the book of Deuteronomy seems to make provision for a time that would come when Israel would be able to rule again. The book of Hosea concludes in chapter 14. Israel is here addressed in their situation of judgment, and then the heroes of the book across time are addressed more generally.

Andrew Dearman remarks upon the degree to which the vocabulary of this chapter is found elsewhere in the book. The commonality of the language in this chapter with earlier parts of the book reflects its development and resolution of the book's broader themes. Joshua Moon observes that the one part of the chapter where the commonality of language with elsewhere in the book is least pronounced, in verses 5 to 7, makes sense when we recognize that it is one of the rare parts of Hosea's prophecy that speaks of the restoration and flourishing of Israel.

More particularly, chapter 14 reverses many of the themes of judgment of chapter 13. Moon summarizes some of the verbal indicators of this motif of reversal. Iniquity, chapter 13 verse 12, is here taken away, chapter 14 verse 2. Concern for political might to save, chapter 13 verse 10, is now admitted as fruitless, chapter 14 verse 3. Repudiation of the work of their hands, chapter 13 verse 2 and 14 verse 3. Yahweh's anger, chapter 13 verse 11, removed, chapter 14 verse 4. And Israel's standing as Jew that dissipates, chapter 13 verse 3, is replaced by Yahweh as Jew that revives, chapter 14 verse 3. In short, the central prophetic message of Hosea stands in front of us as the last thing in our ears as the book comes to a perfectly fitting conclusion.

The chapter opens with an invitation to return to the Lord and a description of how Israel might go about it. This is not the first time that Israel was presented with a call to return in the book. Earlier in chapter 6 verses 1 to 3, Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us that He may heal us.

He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him.

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going out as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing is that after all that Israel has done, after all of Israel's betrayal, infidelity and iniquity, at the very time that it is in free fall, having stumbled over the precipice, descending headlong into the abyss of exile, it has still offered a path of return to the Lord. Even as the nation is lowered into its grave, the people are not altogether forsaken. The prophecy of Hosea began with the prophetic sign of taking a wife of Horeb and having children of Horeb.

That prophetic act ended with Hosea in chapter 3 taking Gomer back to himself. In verses 4 and 5 of that chapter, the prophetic sign act was explained as follows. Beyond the call to return to the Lord, Hosea offers Israel the words of confession with which it could make this return.

At the heart of Israel's failure was its misplaced trust, the trust that it placed in its various lovers, the Baals, foreign powers and even their own kings, rather than trusting in the Lord their God as their divine husband. Israel needed to confess its fault, the insufficiency of Assyria to save, and trust only in the Lord. The Lord alone should have been their source of confidence and security.

They must be cleansed by him and then perform true worship to him. After so many statements of judgment in the book and the terrible sentence that the nation was now suffering, the word of the Lord in verses 4 to 7 is a word of restoration and healing. The Lord would repair what was broken.

He would restore them from their apostasy. Like the glory of the sunshine coming after a terrible storm, they would be bathed, the new in his love. His anger has abated.

As Meir Gruber observes, there is a stark contrast between the way that Israel is described after its restoration and the way it is described earlier in the book. In chapter 9 verse 16, Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. In chapter 13 verse 15, though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the Lord shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched.

In chapter 6 verse 4, in chapter 13 verse 3, the imagery of Jew was used of Ephraim. In



both cases, it was the short-lasting character of the Jew that was focused upon. Ephraim's love is like the short-lasting Jew in chapter 6 verse 4. In chapter 13 verse 3, we are told that they themselves would be like the morning mist, or like the Jew that goes away early, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor, or like smoke from a window.

Here, however, the language of Jew reappears, but it's used in a positive sense. The Lord will be like the refreshment of the Jew to Israel, causing Israel to blossom like the lily. While some commentators have disputed the reading, verses 5, 6, and 7 all make a reference to Lebanon at the end of them.

In verse 5, Israel will take root like the trees of Lebanon. The trees of Lebanon were famous for their grandeur and their quality. Israel would also put out new shoots.

Not only would this eschatological Israel be more firmly embedded in the land, its life would spread out over the land. In addition to the majesty of the trees of Lebanon, in verse 6, in language redolent of the Song of Songs, it is the beauty and fragrance of Lebanon that is highlighted. Hans Walter Wolff quotes Hermann Goethe, In the regions where the mulberry, olive, and fig tree grow, the ground is covered with myrrh, thyme, lavender, sage, citrose, styrax, with fragrant shrubs and herbs which fill the air with pleasant odours, particularly when the wanderer treads upon them.

The language here, then, is language not just of strength and security, but also of delight and beauty. Commentators are divided on verse 7, should we understand the opening statement here to refer to a return and dwelling under the Lord's shadow or under Israel's shadow. Considering the way elsewhere we have imagery similar to this used, with great trees representing kings and their rule, offering shade for those who take rest beneath them, it would not be entirely surprising if this were a reference to people coming under the shade of Israel's restored boughs.

In addition to its new security and fragrance and beauty, Israel would enjoy great fertility and fame. The fertility is described with reference to the grain and the vine, and their fame is associated with the wine of Lebanon. Somewhat ironically, this is the only reference that we have in scripture to this wine of Lebanon.

The lesson that Israel was to learn from all of this was that its security, its provision, and its fruit all came not from idols, but from its divine husband, the Lord. As the book concludes, the hearer is more directly addressed. The words of the prophets are not just for their most immediate hearers and times.

As Brevard Charles has argued, to some extent the words of the prophets are abstracted from their historical contexts. The word of the prophet Hosea does not cease to be relevant or to speak with urgency into people's situations after the northern kingdom of Israel has collapsed. Rather, its words can still address the modern hearer, who

meditates upon them and learns wisdom by them.

A question to consider. The final verse of Hosea chapter 14 moves us from language that we associate more with prophecy, to language of wisdom literature. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things.

Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them. How might this saying direct our hearing of the book?