

The Book of Hosea

Chapter 11

In Hosea, chapter 11, the LORD begins to reveal how adulterous Israel will be restored.

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. (NKJ)

The Lord had made His covenant with Abraham 400 years prior. Yet, Israel was born as a people, as a nation, only when God called him out of Egypt, freeing him from the bondage of Pharaoh's regime. By calling His people out of Egypt, God proved His love to them.

God's redemption of His chosen people, the Jews, from their bondage in Egypt served as a type of Christ's redemption of His bride, the Church, from our bondage to sin.

In the gospel of Matthew, we read that the Lord providentially sent baby Jesus to Egypt and then called him out of Egypt. Let us turn there:

Matthew 2:13-15 "Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he awoke, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son.""

Hosea's prophecy had a future fulfillment at the time of Herod's massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and in all its districts who were two years old and under. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt. After Herod's death, they left Egypt, in fulfillment of the prophecy given to Hosea. Since we are in Christ, since we are the body of Christ, we also have been called out of Egypt, called out of bondage to the sinful world. The word translated *church* in English means just that. The Greek word is *ekklesia*, which means "the called out ones." As Christians we are called out of the world and called to enter Christ's holy kingdom.

In the context of the book of Hosea, Israel had been extremely ungrateful to God for His great love, as shown forth in their redemption from Egypt.

2 As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images.

The great ingratitude of the Israelites was manifested in their idolatry. "They sacrificed to the Baals and burned incense to carved images." God had sent many prophets to His people, calling them to repentance. Yet, the people would not listen to the messengers whom God sent. When the Prophets called them to do one thing, the people did the opposite. So great was the people's obstinacy and stubbornness that they would not obey God, nor listen to His ordained prophets.

The people's self-love was evidenced through their false worship. They made up their own teachings and their own worship, according to their own desires. They had "self-made religion" and "self-imposed worship" (Col. 2:23).

3 "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them.

God was like a kind Father to Ephraim (Israel). He "taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms." God had taken Israel by the hand, bringing him from the grave to the light of life, from spiritual death to spiritual life. Yet, Ephraim responded by rejecting every instruction his father gave him. God had treated the people in a paternal and indulgent manner. Yet, the Lord's continuing expression of love for His people and His continuing bestowal of blessings upon them had not born any fruit on their part.

"But they did not know that I healed them." The people showed themselves to be ungrateful and spiritually blind. How wicked they were to disobey the heavenly Father who had treated them with such kindness. God had brought them out of their bondage in Egypt. Yet, these foolish people would not acknowledge God's love for them. They resented Him and turned to follow other gods.

4 I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped *and* fed them.

God is Master and Lord. Yet, He did not deal with His people severely, as a Master deals with slaves, or oxen, or donkeys. Remember that the Lord earlier likened the people of Israel to a heifer, which shakes off the yoke and in laziness loves only to tread corn. God says, "I have not treated you as slaves, but dealt with you as with children. I have not treated you harshly, but I have drawn you with gentle cords, with bands of love."

There is no basis for the people to accuse God of mistreating them, for He could not have dealt more kindly with them. He disciplined them as a Father should discipline his children, and His only desire was to see His children do what is right. He loved them greatly and wanted what was best for them.

"And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck." God did not give them a heavy burden. Like one who wishes not to burden his ox but rather bears up the yoke himself with his own hands lest the ox should faint through weariness, so God bore the yoke of His people. As God was to the Israelites, "as those who take the yoke from their neck," so also God is to us. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

God adds that He "stooped and fed them." God had shown every fatherly kindness to Israel, but Israel showed nothing but ingratitude for the many blessings and many expressions of kindness they had received.

5 "He shall not return to the land of Egypt; But the Assyrian shall be his king, Because they refused to repent."

The people in vain had cherished the hope that Egypt would be a place of refuge or an asylum for them. The people had deceived themselves by such vain hopes, and by them they had hardened themselves against all God's threatenings. If the Assyrians proved too powerful for them, the Israelites hoped that there would yet be a suitable refuge for them in Egypt among their friends with whom they had made a treaty. Yet, God here gives them a reality check: if you think you will find safe haven in Egypt, then think again. You will not!

God's judgment on unfaithful Israel is unalterable. "The Assyrian shall be his king." In other words, the people will become exiles under the Assyrians, which indeed is what happened.

Why would God judge them in this way? The prophet Hosea explains it is "because they refused to repent." They would not turn back to God. On the contrary, they turned back to Egypt, the country from which God had freed them from bondage and from hundreds of years of slavery. The Israelites should have recalled the type of hospitality that Egypt had shown their ancestors. Yet, their blindness was so great that they wished to return there. How insane a desire this was when they knew just how great was the ferociousness and cruelty of the Egyptians.

God thwarted the Israelites' depraved plans. They were not worthy to return to Egypt. God will force them to be dragged away by force by their conquerors into Assyria. This tyranny will be far worse than the tyranny they knew in Egypt long ago. This is the judgment that they deserved on account of their unrelenting rejection of God and His Word. All this judgment came on them because they refused to repent.

So also if we follow the tragic course of ancient Israel, if we refuse to repent of our sinful beliefs and practices, then we face the awful prospect of God's judgment. Therefore, let us humble ourselves and repent. May we turn from our sins and turn to Christ, following Him and His Word alone. May we serve Christ and not follow the ways of the world.

6 And the sword shall slash in his cities, Devour his districts, And consume *them*, Because of their own counsels.

The people might not take the prophet Hosea's words seriously. After all, Israel had great fortified cities and a strong defense. How could the Assyrians conquer them? It was not possible, they thought.

Yet, God declares what will surely come to pass. The sword, when it falls on the cities of Israel, will consume and destroy whatever strength and defense they possessed.

Why will this come to pass? All these horrific judgments will befall Israel because they foolishly followed "their own counsels" instead of God's. They turned aside from God's law, from His Word, and went their own way. They were prideful. In their arrogance, they thought *they* knew what was best. They looked down on God's ways as outdated and laughed at every instruction they received from His prophets. They would not condescend and humble themselves to obey the word of the Lord.

7 My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt Him.

The people of Israel who were called by God's name were "bent on backsliding from Him"; they were determined to turn away from God. They followed their own counsels and no longer would follow the true God. They would not listen to His Word, obey His Word, or follow His perfect way.

Nevertheless, they still considered themselves to be God's chosen people. They still prayed. They still called on the name of the "Most High God." Yet, it was all a giant hypocrisy, a complete fraud. For "none at all exalt Him." They exalted the Egyptians; they exalted themselves; they exalted the Baals; but they did not exalt the one true God, the Most High.

8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. 9 I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror.

God did not hastily execute His judgment and wrath against Israel. He did not hastily fall into anger or devote to ruin people who had lightly sinned. The struggle He describes is like that of an earthly judge who struggles to sentence an inmate to death or to show him compassion. In this case, the defendant is the Judge's own wife and children! How difficult this would be from a human standpoint. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over [to the Assyrians], Israel?" How can I make you like Admah and Zeboim, the cities that I destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah? "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

God expresses uncertainty, as I have said, so as to express that He is not carried away too suddenly to inflict punishment, even when men in various ways provoke His vengeance. Yet, we must also keep in mind that what God will do is certain and that His decree depends not on the "free will" of men, for He is not ignorant of what He shall do.

These words express God's sympathy and love, yet they also express the terrors of His judgment. The prophet Hosea's words should strike with terror the proud and ungodly Israelites, as He set before their eyes their own destruction. He reminds the Israelites that they are deserving of the same fate as that which befell "Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and His wrath." (Deut. 29:23).

God does not change. God is not confused as to what He will do. What He is saying is that if He dealt with the people of Israel as they deserved, they would now be made like Sodom and Gomorrah. But since God was merciful and embraced His people with fatherly affection, He could not forget that He was Israel's Husband and Father. He would be willing to grant forgiveness if His unfaithful wife and children (i.e., the people of Israel) would repent.

God says, "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger." This shows us the punishment that Israel deserved. Israel's sin was so great that the people deserved to receive the fierceness of God's holy, righteous anger. God adds, "I will not again destroy Ephraim,"

which seems to mean that God will not completely and utterly wipe out the people of Israel, as He did the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns. The hope of salvation yet remains for the godly few who repent and turn back to God.

Ungodly men laugh to scorn all threatening, but those in whom there is any seed of piety and godliness dread the vengeance of God. This is why the Lord reminds the people, "For I am God, and not man." In other words, God will be merciful to His people. He will be faithful to His elect remnant. So God's elect children must not lose all hope at the proclamation of His coming wrath.

God is "The Holy One in your midst." He is the Holy One of Israel. He had chosen Israel to be His bride, His special people. He had promised forever to be their God. So He will moderate His vengeance so that some Church may forever remain. He will spare His elect remnant. Thus, He declares, "I will not come with terror." God will make war against Israel and subdue them and force them to surrender, suffering great loss. But when the gates shall be opened and the walls demolished, He will then restrain Himself, for He is not willing to destroy them entirely.

In regard to the nation as a whole, the prophet has already shown that their cities will be destroyed by fire and the whole nation is doomed to suffer the wrath of God. But now God explains that He will spare His remnant and even the unbelieving shall not be entirely destroyed, for many of them will be led into captivity. During the time of their exile in Assyria, those rebellious hypocrites who were still alive would have yet another opportunity to repent before it was too late. The exile (which meant being banished from the once holy land) gave them a picture of the hell they would endure for all eternity, separated *forever* from God's benevolent presence, if they remained unrepentant. In executing His wrath on Israel, God remembered His mercy and showed His mercy to the people (cf. Hab. 3:2).

10 "They shall walk after the LORD. He will roar like a lion. When He roars, Then His sons shall come trembling from the west; 11 They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, Like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses," Says the LORD.

Here we find words of hope and promise from the Lord to the people of Israel who were about to be sent into exile. In the future, there is the hope of restoration. For a time God will forsake them so that they may languish in their dispersion among the Gentiles as punishment for their unrepentant, rebellious hearts. Yet, in the future He will gather them, showing Himself as their leader that He may restore them.

"He will roar like a lion. When He roars, then His sons shall come trembling from the west." When God roars as a lion, the Egyptians and Assyrians will be subdued and fear. "They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria." When the nations attempt to hinder the return of God's people and strive against them with great force and effort, God will break down their courage. And God will let His people "dwell in their houses."

This prophecy may look forward to the second coming of Christ when Christ gathers together His people into their heavenly homes. Then, all true believers "shall walk after the LORD." They shall be led by the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is the resurrected Christ (cf. Rev. 5:5).

12 "Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, And the house of Israel with deceit; But Judah still walks with God, Even with the Holy One *who is faithful*."

As we have learned throughout the book of Hosea, Ephraim, the Israelites, the ten tribes of the north, were pathological liars and deceivers. They deceived their neighbors. They lied about God, and they taught false doctrine. They tolerated and even actively promoted false worship. They perpetuated lies about God and deceived the people with their false teachings and practices.

Yet, how vain it is to make excuses before God. Can a man deceive God? Clearly, God knows our hearts; He is all-knowing and all-seeing.

Chapter 11 concludes with encouraging words regarding the southern kingdom of Judah. "But Judah still walks with God, even with the Holy One who is faithful." The kingdom of Judah, unlike Israel, was a legitimate kingdom, for it was connected with a pure and lawful priesthood.

The northern kingdom of Israel was corrupt ever since it was established by Jeroboam's revolt against the family of David, led by Rehoboam. Jeroboam changed both the law and the worship of God and built new temples. Israel did not walk with God, but Judah did. Although there was much corruption in the southern kingdom, yet they retained the worship prescribed by the law. In comparison with the false worship in Israel, pure religion always prevailed at Jerusalem.

"Even with the Holy One who is faithful" may refer to God or the phrase may be translated "even with the holy ones who are faithful," in which case it would refer to the Old Testament saints such as Abraham. Either way, Judah was relatively faithful to God and walked as the saints who went before them. They continued in obedience to the law and were relatively careful to maintain true worship.

Based on textual variations in the Hebrew manuscripts, some modern English translations give a negative reading of verse 12, saying: "Judah is also unruly against God, Even against the Holy One who is faithful." In this case, Hosea is reminding us of Judah's own sins. This is one of the rare instances in which we aren't really sure which statement was in the original text, as the Biblical manuscripts do not all agree. However, both readings are true statements regarding Judah. Despite periods of reform, Judah was rebellious and idolatrous. Yet, in comparison with Israel, Judah was relatively faithful.