**Hosea Commentary**

**Hosea Chapter 1**

Hos 1:1

**“in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.”** Hosea’s ministry lasted 50 years, say from 770 BC to 720 BC, although those dates could be moved forward or backward. Uzziah (also called Azariah) started his sole reign over Judah about 775 BC, and Hezekiah ended his reign in Judah about 697 BC. Jeroboam II of Israel reigned as sole king from about 790 BC to 760 BC. Jeroboam was the last powerful king of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria, and that is likely why Hosea does not mention any other king of Israel besides Jeroboam.

Prophets who were contemporaries of Hosea include Isaiah (Isa. 1:1), and Micah (cf. Mic. 1:1. Micah started a little later than Hosea and Isaiah). Amos likely was (Amos 1:1), and also Jonah and Nahum likely were as well.

Hos 1:2

**“Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and *have* children of prostitution.”** The Hebrew text is brief and powerful, but that can make its meaning unclear. A “wife of prostitution” is a prostitute, and given the situation that Israel was in, given over to the worship of Baal and other pagan gods, it is quite possible that this prostitute was a temple prostitute in one of the pagan temples. In the Old Testament God often required prophets to act out the lesson that God wanted to show to the people. In this case, Israel had abandoned her legitimate “husband” (she had made a covenant to be faithful at Sinai; Exod. 24:3-8), and had gone after other gods, and God used the example of Hosea to show Israel how they were behaving.

The meaning of the phrase “children of prostitution” is not exactly clear. Grammatically, it can mean have children by Gomer, the prostitute, or it can mean have children who will become prostitutes themselves, or it can mean both those things, and some scholars suggest that Hosea was to marry Gomer who already had children through her prostitution. However, because Hosea could not determine what his children would grow up to do, the most likely meaning is “have children by the prostitute” (cf. CJB, NJB, GW).

**“the land commits great adultery.”** In this case, “the land” is put by metonymy for the people who live on the land, but as we know from so many other scriptures, when the people of the land sin, the land itself is affected (see commentary on Lev. 18:25).

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Hos 1:3

**“Gomer.”** The name means “completion; ripeness.” As symbolic of the country of Israel, she was the completeness of sensuality and thus wickedness. It seems that Gomer ran away from Hosea and became the lover/slave of another man, and Hosea had to buy her back, and Gomer’s life as symbolic of Israel continued (Hos. 3:1-5).

**“Diblaim.”** Hosea 1:3 is the only occurrence of the name Diblaim in the Bible, and it means something like “Double fig cakes” or “Twin fig cakes.” The name is an obvious reference to sensuality and shows that Gomer’s mother was a prostitute like Gomer was. The pair, Diblaim then Gomer, the prostitute and the daughter of a prostitute, are symbolic of Israel, which was wicked and increasing in wickedness until that wickedness was complete and ripe for God’s judgment. Indeed, Israel incurred that judgment at the hands of the Assyrians who carried Israel away and replaced the people with pagans from other countries Assyria had conquered. “Diblaim” also is likely to be a pointed reference and reminder of Israel’s idolatrous sin in that her name, “Double fig cake,” reminds Israel of their idolatry and that they loved the raisin cakes that were offered as a food offering to some of their idol gods (Hos. 3:1). Typically in food offerings, some of it was burned for the gods and the rest eaten by the priests or people.

Hos 1:4

**“Jezreel.”** The name has a double meaning that God uses very effectively in Hosea 1. Here it refers to scattering; that God would scatter Israel, but in Hosea 1:11 it refers to the “gathering” that follows the sowing (see commentary on Hos. 1:11).

Hos 1:6

**“Lo-ruhamah.”** The Hebrew word *Ruhamah* means “compassion, pity, mercy, love.” The Hebrew word “*lo*” means “no,” and thus “Lo-ruhamah” was a name that meant “No compassion” or “No mercy” or No love” (the English versions differ in their translation depending on what the translator felt was being emphasized in the context). Probably “mercy,” with its technical sense of withholding merited judgment” is not the best, while “no love” may be too broad. It seems “No compassion” or “No pity” is most fitting in the context. However, in Hosea 9:15 God says that He no longer loves Israel.

Hos 1:7

**“I will have compassion on the house of Judah.”** God had compassion on Judah and saved them from the Assyrians by a miracle (2 Kings 19:32-35). But Judah continued to sin and so God did not save them from the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar carried the people captive to Babylon and burned down Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 24-25).

Hos 1:9

**“Lo-ammi.”** The Hebrew word *Am* means “people” and *Ammi* is the possessive, “my people.” The Hebrew word “*lo*” means “no,” and thus “Lo-ammi” was a name that meant “Not my people.” The people of the country of Israel (the ten northern tribes) had sinned so greatly and for so long that God rejected them as His people. Nevertheless, He will in the future regather them and give them their inheritance in the land of Israel.

[For more on the ten lost tribes of Israel being regathered in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Jer. 32:37.]

**“and I will not be your *God*.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “and I will not be yours.” Although many translations add the word “God” for clarity, some scholars suggest that it should not be supplied here. God is still the God of Israel in reality, and so what the text is saying is that from a practical and experiential sense, God will no longer be Israel’s God. But we know from many verses of Scripture that Israel will eventually be regathered and God will be their God again (see commentary on Hos. 1:11).

Hos 1:11

**“jezreel.”** The name has a double meaning that God uses very effectively in Hosea 1. It refers to the act of sowing, which involves both scattering, the scattering of seed, and the planting of seed by means of scattering it on the ground, and by extension, also the act of gathering. So “jezreel” can mean “to scatter” or “to plant” depending on the context. So in Hosea 1, “jezreel” does not refer to the city, but God is using the meaning of the name to prophesy about the future of Israel. It will be scattered, and years later it will be replanted in the land of Israel.

In Hosea 1:4, God uses “jezreel” with the meaning of “scatter,” because Israel was about to be scattered by the Assyrians. During the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, the Assyrians conquered Israel and carried the people away captive, and scattered them in different places around the Assyrian Empire (cf. 2 Kings 17:6). However, in Hosea 1:11 God used “jezreel” to refer to God’s “sowing” or planting Israel in its own land, bringing it back from captivity. Many verses prophesy Israel’s return to the land of Israel, the Promised Land, and Hosea 1:11 is one of them.

[For more information on Israel’s return to the Promised Land, see commentary on Jer. 32:37.]

**“flourish in the land.”** The Hebrew text is unclear, and one of the common translations, “go up from the land” does not fit the context or the many other prophecies about the restoration of Israel. J. Andrew Dearman writes, “The verb may be used here in an agricultural sense, however, as in ‘growing up’ or ‘increasing/flourishing’ (Deut. 29:23 [MT22]), rather than in its more common geographical sense of departing.”[[1]](#footnote-29913) Other similar translations include the CEB, GW, NET, NIrV, NLT; cf. NRSV.

**Hosea Chapter 2**

Hos 2:2

**“your mother.”** Israel is called “your mother,” as the source and intended nurturer of the people of Israel, but she has led them astray, and God will soon divorce her (she will be conquered and carried away captive by Assyria).

**“let her put an end to her prostitution *that is* on her face and her adulteries from between her breasts.”** This seems to be the figure of speech amphibologia (double entendre) where one thing is said but two things apply.

It is clearly an admonition from God for the woman, the “mother,” (in this case, Israel) to stop committing adultery, which in this case is both spiritual, the worship of other gods, and physical, because pagan religion often involved prostitution and cultic adultery. However, the admonition also seems to refer to literally removing the physical symbols of paganism and prostitution. Prostitutes and idol worshipers would “advertise” their beliefs and practices just as today certain modes of dress let people know a person’s profession or position on a subject. Thus, removing prostitution from her face would involve removing the idol or idol symbol that was worn as a nose ring on her face, and removing the adultery from between her breasts would mean removing the symbol of her god or her profession as a prostitute from between her breasts.

Hos 2:11

**“her new moons.”** This is referring to the celebrations and feasts that were connected with the new moon. The new moon, the beginning of the month, was celebrated with special sacrifices and offerings under the Law of Moses (see commentary on Num. 28:11).

Hos 2:14

This verse is an abrupt shift in the context and speaks of the future restoration of Israel, which will fully occur in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ when Jesus rules over the earth.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Hos 2:19

**“righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6). God is promising that when He brings Israel back to Himself, he will treat her in a just and godly way.

**Hosea Chapter 3**

Hos 3:4

**“For the children of Israel are going to remain many days without a king.”** Hosea was one of the prophets who foretold the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel (Hos. 1:4), which came to pass in 722 BC at the hands of the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6). Then, “afterward,” the children of Israel would return to Israel, which will happen when Jesus comes from heaven, conquers the earth, and regathers the people of Israel. From 722 BC even until now the Kingdom of Israel consisting of the ten northern tribes of Israel, has not existed. So, true to the prophecy, it has had no king, no sacrifice, no standing-stones, and no ephod or idol; it has been gone as a kingdom.

[For more on the ten lost tribes of Israel being regathered in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on the future reign of Christ on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

**“teraphim.”** Teraphim were household gods (see commentary on Gen. 31:19).

**“without a standing-stone.”** In this case, the standing-stone is similar to the idols in the verse; they were representative of the idol gods Israel worshiped in defiance of God’s command.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

Hos 3:5

**“return.”** That is, return to the land of Israel (see commentary on Jer. 32:37).

**“David.”** Here in Hosea 3:5, the Messiah is called “David.” This is the figure of speech antonomasia, “name change,” where a person is called by a name other than his or her own name in order to import characteristics from the other person. The Messiah is called “David” in Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25, as well as Jeremiah 30:9 and here in Hosea 3:5.

[For a more complete explanation of the Messiah being called “David,” see commentary on Ezek. 34:23.]

**Hosea Chapter 4**

Hos 4:1

**“lawsuit.”** The Hebrew noun translated “lawsuit” is *rib* (#07379 רִיב pronounced reeb, related to the verb, #07378), and it has a wide range of meanings including strife, controversy, dispute, quarrel, accusation, lawsuit, etc. The wide range of meanings is attested to by the different translations in the English versions: “controversy” (ASV, ESV, KJV); “cause against” (BBE); “grievance against” (CJB); “case against” (HCSB, NASB); “enter into judgment with” (DBY); “dispute” (NAB); “charge to bring against” (NIV); “indicts” (NJB); “has an indictment against” (NRSV); “brought charges against” (NLT).

The NET uses “covenant lawsuit,” which can be clarifying because the charges in the lawsuit are based upon the covenant that Israel made with God (Exod. 24:3-8; we refer to it as “the Old Covenant”). Israel broke the covenant so God is bringing a lawsuit against Israel which, because of her refusal to repent and return to God, will eventually lead to Him divorcing her and sending her away (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8).

**“covenant faithfulness.”** The word translated “covenant faithfulness” is *hesed* (#02617 חֶסֶד), and it has a very broad range of meanings, including “mercy, faithfulness, goodness, graciousness, etc. It was also the word used when two or more parties had an agreement or covenant, and it expressed the joint obligations of the parties, such as covenant faithfulness, love, loyalty, or obligation. It is used almost 250 times in the Old Testament, often because Israel had failed to keep the covenant they made with God and thus abandoned their obligations and the covenant faithfulness and love they agreed to. That is the case here in Hosea 4:1.

The reason Yahweh had a “covenant lawsuit” against Israel is that they had broken the covenant they made with God (Exod. 24:3-8; we refer to that covenant as “the Old Covenant”). Israel ignored the covenant they made with God and even openly defied it. God compared His covenant with Israel as a marriage, and when Israel broke the covenant and refused to repent, eventually God divorced Israel and sent her away (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8); Israel was captured by the Assyrians and deported from their land (2 Kings 17:6-23). The deportation of Israel was still future when Hosea 4:1 was written.

The range of meanings of *hesed* in this context makes it hard to agree on the best English translation, and that fact is reflected in the translations: “goodness” (ASV); “faithful love” (CJB, HCSB); “steadfast love” (ESV); “mercy” (KJV); “loyalty” (NAB, NET); “kindness” (NASB, NLT); “love” (NIV). In fact, however, all those things are based on the fact that Israel abandoned the covenant, and thus “covenant faithfulness” seems to catch all the different failures of Israel. God expects people to keep their vows, oaths, promises, and covenants, and it is very serious when they do not, and ignore what they said. As God says in Ecclesiastes: “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. (Eccl. 5:5).

Hos 4:2

**“break all boundaries.”** The Hebrew is literally, “they break out,” and that phrase is used literally of breaking physical boundaries but here it is used figuratively of breaking moral boundaries and resorting to immoral behavior and even violence. That explains translations such as the NET: “they resort to violence.” While that is historically true, the people did more than resort to violence, they were involved in many different kinds of immoral behavior and shed lots of blood.

Hos 4:5

**“destroy your mother.”** In this case, the “mother” is the whole nation, the nation as a whole, who has given birth to the rebellious Israelites of the time. That did happen when Assyria conquered and carried away the nation of Israel.

Hos 4:6

**“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”** The people of God are expected to know the will of God, and the best way to do that is to know the Word of God, which are the words from the mouth of God and therefore the will of God. If we do not take the time to know God we are fools, just like God says: “For my people are fools, they do not know me. They are senseless children, and they have no understanding” (Jer. 4:22).

**“you have forgotten the law.”** Here in Hosea 4:6, God uses the word “forgotten” idiomatically. Here it means more than “forget,” although the people certainly did forget much of the Law simply because they paid no attention to it for so long. Here the Hebrew means that Israel “ignored” the Law, then “rejected” the Law, then forgot it due to neglect. The BBE translation reads that the people “have not kept in mind” the Law. The NIV reads that the people “ignored” the Law. The NET translation says the people “reject” the Law. All those different English translations get part of the meaning correct. The meaning of the idiom is very broad.

[For more on the idiomatic use of words such as “forget,” see commentary on Luke 23:42, “remember.”]

Hos 4:8

**“feed on the sin offerings of my people.”** The Hebrew word translated as “sin offering” is *chattah* (#02403 חַטָּאָה) means both “sin” (Lev. 4:3) and “sin offering” (Lev. 4:8), and the English versions have both readings: “sin” (CSB, ESV, KJV); “sin offering” (JPS, NET, NLT). Here in Hosea 4:8 it likely means both and thus is an amphibologia, a double entendre. The priests were living off of (feeding on) the sin of the people by literally eating the sin offerings of the people (“feed on” can also be translated “eat up” as in the KJV). “Sin offering” is singular in the Hebrew text, but it is a collective singular, and thus “sin offerings” is a viable translation (cf. JPS, NET, NLT).

The priests were allowed to eat portions of many of the sacrifices. For example, the priest ate some of the grain offerings (Lev. 6:4-16, 18; 7:9-10), the sin offerings (Lev. 6:26, 29), the guilt offerings (Lev. 7:6), and the peace offerings (Lev. 7:28-34). The fact that the priests got to eat parts of some of the sacrifices is one reason why the altar of the Lord was also referred to as the “table” of the Lord (see commentary on Mal. 1:7). The priests were allowed to eat some of the meat of the sin offering (Lev. 6:26), but the people were not allowed to.

We learn from Hosea 1:1 that Hosea wrote at the very end of the Kingdom of Israel, after which it was conquered and deported by the King of Assyria (2 Kings 17:5-23). At the time of Hosea, the political and priestly system of the Kingdom of Israel was very corrupt; in fact, the whole priestly system in the Kingdom of Israel had started with priests who were not from Aaron and who led the worship of golden calves (1 Kings 12:28-32). The priests in the Kingdom of Judah were corrupt as well.

The second stanza of the verse, “and set their heart on their iniquity,” shows that the priests enjoyed eating the rich meat of the various offerings, and thus had no real incentive to work to help the people overcome their sin. The more the people sinned, the more food the priests got to eat. God originally gave the priests a share of some of the sacrifices as a reward for their labor, but now the priests had perverted the system and were happy when people sinned.

That the priest got to regularly eat meat already put them in a very privileged position in the biblical culture, because it was not common in those days for people to eat meat for a number of reasons: most people were poor, there was no way to reliably preserve the meat, and much of the meat that was eaten was of poor quality. Proverbs 7:14 gives us some insight into how attractive good meat could be in the biblical culture and how it could be used to help lure people into sin (see commentary on Prov. 7:14). The priests got the best meat in the land because the animals had been offered to God, but they were not thankful for that and instead looked forward to people sinning so they could have more.

One point that the Bible makes again and again is that if the heart of the person doing the sacrifice was not right with God, then the sacrifice was not acceptable to God (see commentaries on Amos 5:22 and Matt. 5:24). This should have been something that the priests were teaching the people and themselves as well.

Hos 4:11

**”prostitution, wine, and new wine.”** Wine and alcoholic drinks have always been associated with sex and sexual promiscuity, as we see here in Hosea (cf. Hab. 2:15).

**“understanding.”** The Hebrew word translated “understanding” is *leb* (#03820 לֵב), which is often translated “heart.” *Leb* occurs over 800 times in the Old Testament, and it has a very large number of different meanings—and often combines a number of meanings into one use. The Hebrew language and culture ascribe physical, mental, and moral functions to the heart, as well as control over the physical body. Actually, *leb* has so many meanings that saying it means “heart” is too restrictive. The full range of meanings of *leb* includes, but is not limited to, heart, inner man, mind, will, thinking, reflection, inclination, resolution, understanding, sense or good sense, and in some contexts, it can also refer to the seat of passion and emotion. In this context in Hosea, idolatry and wine take away the understanding and good sense of the people. Different English versions translate *leb* differently in this context (“wisdom” BBE; “wits” CJB; “heart” KJV; “mind” TNK).

[For more on the Hebrew word *leb* and its use in Scripture, see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

Hos 4:12

**“a spirit of prostitution has led them astray.”** In this context, “a spirit” is not an “attitude” or function of the mind; it is a demon. When someone begins to break the first and great commandment about having no other gods except Yahweh, and turns away from God and begins to worship idols, there are serious consequences. Demons crave worship, and are drawn to any idol that is worshiped, so having idols invites demons into one’s life. Furthermore, because of the rejection of the true God, divine protection and blessing is limited or cut off. The person who seeks idols for blessings ends up bringing trouble on themselves, even if sometimes that trouble is delayed and/or results in lack of rewards on the Day of Judgment.

Here in Hosea 4:12, the people had been consulting their idols and asking them for guidance, and thus it is easy to see how demons could have entered into the situation. Demons are more than happy to “help” people with spiritual advice and lead them away from the true God. The fact that often demonic advice is good advice fools people, because they think, “This is good advice, so it must somehow come from God.” Untrue! The fact that the person did not go to God to get the advice, and then gets good advice from an idol only reinforces their abandonment of God and His commandments, which eventually leads to disaster for the individual. Deuteronomy 18:10-13 sternly warns people to avoid pagan and ungodly ways of gaining information.

Ahaz, king of Judah, worshiped pagan gods to get help from them, but they were his downfall (2 Chron. 28:22-23). Ahaz should have stopped sinning and been diligent to return himself and his kingdom to obedience to Yahweh, and then he could have gotten the help he wanted from Yahweh, but instead, he turned to idols. Idols of any kind will eventually, if not immediately, bring trouble upon the worshiper.

Idols take many forms, and we Christians must be vigilant to keep our lives pure. The Epistle of 1 John ends with, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). People often think that an idol is always in the form of a statue of some kind, but by definition, an idol is anything that is worshiped instead of the true God. It could be a “protective statue” of some kind, but it could also be a “lucky hat,” angel pin, rabbit’s foot, or anything else that is looked to for spiritual help and protection of any kind. That explains why the apostle John would warn his Christian audience to guard themselves against having idols. He was not really worried about them having statues of Zeus or other Greco-Roman gods, but the Roman world was full of amulets and other “protective objects,” or objects that supposedly brought blessings, and those things are idols.

Also, although here in Hosea 4:12 “a spirit of prostitution” refers to a demon, the Hebrew vocabulary allows for the word “spirit” to mean “attitude,” and in this case, there seems to be a subtle undertone that once a person becomes insensitive to what the true worship of Yahweh involves, and they begin to worship idols, including having protective amulets and lucky objects, they tend to become more and more involved with, and/or defensive of, their idolatry. Many people become very committed to their beliefs and superstitions about the things they believe protect or bless them, and their committed attitude toward their idols results in their being unwilling to let their idols go and return to the worship of Yahweh alone. But that is what we must do to be pure before God and give Him the worship He deserves; worship with all our heart, all our mind, and all our strength. God does not want “some” of our heart, while we give the rest to some protective amulet or “lucky” object. “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

Hos 4:15

**“Gilgal.”** Gilgal had long been a center of idol worship (cf. Judg. 3:19).

**“Beth-aven.”** “Beth-aven” means “House of Wickedness,” and it was the name that God was giving Bethel (Beth-el; House of God) which is where Abraham had stayed a while and Jacob had seen God in the “Jacob’s Ladder” incident. That once godly place had become a center of idolatry.

**Hosea Chapter 5**

Hos 5:3

**“You have now turned to prostitution.”** This included the worship of pagan gods, which God considered adultery or prostitution (cf. Hos. 2:13, 17), and also ritual prostitution at the pagan temples and sites of worship, and also just plain prostitution (cf. Hos. 1:2; 4:10-11).

Hos 5:6

**“go with their flocks and with their herds.”** The people are being very religious and bringing multitudes of animal sacrifices to the Temple to seek God, but their heart is not right with God. They may be “religious,” but they do what they want to do and disobey God in their thoughts and deeds, so God will not listen to them. This is a consistent message in Scripture, and verses like this occur many times in both the Old and New Testaments.

[For more information, see commentary on Matt. 5:24.]

**“He has withdrawn himself from them.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are detestable to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. Proverbs 21:27 and 28:9 say that the sacrifices of a wicked person are an abomination to God. Similarly, God will not listen to the prayers of wicked and unrepentant people; they are an abomination to Him (Prov. 28:9).

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Hos 5:7

**“the new moon will devour them.”** In astronomy, the “new moon” is the time when the moon cannot be seen from Earth, and the sky is dark. But biblically, the “new moon” is when the first sliver of the moon can be seen, and when it was seen, and the sighting was verified by other witnesses, the new month began on the Jewish calendar and the Jews held a festival to celebrate.

The phrase “the new moon will devour them” here in Hosea 5:7 is a reference to the fact that the Israelites had mixed their pagan worship into the worship of God, and so their new moon festivals had become pagan and evil (Isa. 1:13-14; cf. Neh. 10:33; Ps. 81:3; Jer. 8:2; Ezek. 46:6). Now the consequences of their sin were about to come upon them, and they were about to be destroyed because of their ungodly ways.

Hos 5:8

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“Beth-aven.”** “Beth-aven” means “House of Wickedness,” and was a derogatory term the prophet used for the town of Bethel (Beth-el), which means “House of God,” but which had the golden calf idol that Jeroboam had made. See commentary on Hosea 4:15.

Hos 5:12

**“like a moth.”** In biblical times moths were very destructive and very hard to stop. They destroyed many vital and valuable things, including clothing and shelter made of wool. God is threatening to destroy Israel.

**Hosea Chapter 6**

Hos 6:2

**“After two days…on the third day.”** This is an idiom meaning after a little while. Some of the Israelites were confident, as they should have been, that if they returned to Yahweh, He would bless them. It might not happen immediately, but they were confident it would happen shortly. Sadly, Israel never did return to Yahweh, and they were conquered by the Assyrians and deported from the land of Israel (2 Kings 17:5-23).

Andersen and Freedman write: “The use of the series x, x+1 to achieve a climax is common in ancient literature, especially in the Canaanite tradition.”[[2]](#footnote-21414) Normally the third day was used to mark a short period of time. Often it was connected with resurrection and life, which was due to the fact that it was believed that a dead body could be revived through the third day, after which decay made resurrection impossible (see commentary on John 11:6). Here, the people were saying God would revive Israel if they returned to Him.

Hos 6:3

**“spring rain.”** This is also known as the “latter rain,” and it brings the harvest to maturity. See commentary on James 5:7.

Hos 6:4

**“Ephraim, what am I going to do with you.”** The speaker abruptly shifts and now is God.

**“morning cloud.”** The context shows us that this simile in Hosea 6:4, “like a morning cloud,” refers to the morning clouds that look promising, like they will bring some needed rain, or at least bring shade, but then they disappear as the day goes on. So many people are like that: they make promises and talk big talk, but then do not do what they said and are gone when you need them.

Hos 6:5

**“have cut.”** This is partially true, and partially a prophetic perfect idiom, which could be translated “I will cut them in pieces” (cf. NET). By the time of Hosea, Israel had disobeyed God over and over, and had suffered for it. However, they had not yet suffered the destruction that was about to come upon them.

Since Israel had already suffered greatly for her sins, the fact that the verb is past tense should not be ignored completely, even though there is also a future tense meaning to the verb as expressed by the prophetic perfect idiom. Whereas some versions translated the verb as a future (cf. NET), to translate the verb as a past tense follows the Hebrew text. God is loving and patient, and when people turn from Him there are usually many warnings and chances to repent before total disaster comes. In this case, the destruction of Israel had already begun to happen, but its complete destruction was still future.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“by the prophets.”** The prophets did not execute God’s judgment on the Israelites, the Israelites brought disasters on themselves by their own sin. Nevertheless, what the prophets spoke by revelation played an important role in bringing God’s will to pass. When a prophet spoke by revelation, having trust and confidence in the words that he or she was speaking, the words had spiritual power and made an impact in both the spiritual and physical world. Although God can act in the world without help from human agents, the fact that God sometimes directs humans to speak into the physical world the revelation that He gives to them shows that the action that humans take is important in getting God’s work done. The majority of the time prophets speak, they speak about God and what He has done or will do. But sometimes the prophets themselves speak the words of God to bring things to pass on earth, which is a major reason why Hosea 6:5 says God cut people in pieces by the prophets. While there are times when that could just mean the prophets spoke warnings about disasters that came to pass when the people ignored the warnings, it can also mean the words of the prophets directly affected what happened on earth.

The reason that the cooperation between God and the prophet is important in accomplishing the will of God is never explicitly explained in Scripture. Nevertheless, that cooperation occurs throughout the Bible, and that explains why sometimes God commands prophets to speak things that they themselves could never accomplish in the flesh. Thus, for example, God told Jeremiah to speak what He commanded, and thus, “to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jer. 1:7, 10), and God told Ezekiel to send Egypt to the underworld, in other words, prophesy the defeat and death of the Egyptians (Ezek. 32:18). But there are times when the prophets prophesied healing and restoration as well (cf. Ezek. 37:4-10). There are many other examples of God telling a prophet to speak against someone or something (cf. Ezek. 13:2, 17; 39:1).

It could well be that since Adam gave dominion of the earth over to Satan who now holds sway over the earth (Luke 4:6; 1 John 5:19), that for God to righteously act on the earth He often needs the willing cooperation of the people of earth. Whatever the reason, God does command His people to speak things into the physical world that God wants accomplished, and it is important that God’s people speak with confidence and boldness the things God tells them to speak. Especially today in the Administration of Grace, when every believer has the gift of holy spirit and every believer can prophesy, each Christian should realize the powerful and important role they play in the unfolding of God’s will on earth, and always be watchful for how God or the Lord Jesus might direct them to speak by the spirit and influence the spiritual and physical happenings on earth. The New Testament is clear that when believers get revelation they can speak miracles and healings into being, and we must be ready, willing, and confident to speak the revelation God gives us, whatever that revelation is, and to participate in bringing His will to pass on earth.

[For more on the Devil ruling the earth, see commentary on Luke 4:6.]

**“my judgments.”** This is the correct reading of the text, which was corrupted. The correct reading is preserved in Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta text, and Aramaic Targums and is followed in a number of English versions, including the ESV, HCSB, NAB, NCV, NET, NIV, NJB, and NRSV.

**“go forth like the light of dawn.”** The Hebrew text of Hosea 6:5 simply reads that God’s judgments “go out as light.” The ambiguity of the phrase has caused some scholars to think that the “light” that goes out is lightning and that God’s judgments are like lightning, swift and terrible (cf. HCSB, NIV84); while other scholars think that the light going out is the light of the sun at dawn; sure to come (cf. CEV, NET, NIV2011). We favor the position that this verse is referring to the morning light going forth at dawn. There are plenty of examples of the Hebrew word for “light” being used that way: Judg. 16:2; 19:26; 1 Sam. 14:36; 25:34, 36; 2 Sam. 17:22; 23:4; 2 Kings 7:9; Neh. 8:3; Job 24:14; Prov. 4:18; Mic. 2:1.

Furthermore, that God’s judgment would be compared to the light of dawn flows from the context, starting in Hosea 6:2, where the idea of reviving and being raised up is introduced. Hosea 6:3 is much clearer, with God being compared to the dawn. Hosea 6:4 is also a clear picture of the dawn light, which makes the morning clouds and dew disappear. Hosea 6:5 simply continues that flow of meaning, except now God’s judgments are compared to the dawn light: they are sure to come, because Israel is not repentant.

Hos 6:6

**“For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.”** This phrase is quoted in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7.

**“I desire.”** What God desires here—mercy and knowledge of God (both intellectual and experiential)—is timeless. Although the verb is in the perfect tense, the translation in the present tense catches the meaning and is preferred in almost all translations. Jesus certainly understood the meaning of this verse to be a timeless truth and quoted it on two different occasions (Matt. 9:13; 12:7).

**“mercy.”** The word translated “mercy” is *hesed* (#02617 חֶסֶד), and it has a very broad range of meanings. The translation “mercy” was chosen because of the way the verse is quoted in the Septuagint and in the Greek text of Matthew, which read *eleos* (#1656 ἔλεος), meaning “mercy; kindness or good will toward the poor, weak, afflicted.” The Shem-Tov Hebrew manuscript of Matthew reads *hesed*, as the Hebrew Old Testament does.

[For more on “mercy” and *hesed,* see commentary on Hos. 4:1. For more on the Shem-Tov manuscript of Matthew, see commentary on Matt. 3:3.]

**“and not sacrifice.”** By the time of Hosea, the sacrificial system had been perverted and the heart of the people was cold toward God. We can see this from both the historical books such as Kings (cf. 2 Kings 17:7-23), and from the prophets, such as Hosea, as well as Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, who were all contemporaries with Hosea but at different times during his life. Moreover, God never intended for sacrifices and offerings to make people be, or feel, accepted in His sight if they were not also genuinely repentant for their sin and had a desire to obey His Word. Sacrifices and offerings do not buy God’s acceptance. In fact, the offerings and even the prayers of the wicked are not accepted by God. Humility and obedience always come first and are what God is looking for.

[For more on God being more concerned with love and obedience than sacrifices, see commentary on Matt. 5:24. For more on God not speaking much about sacrifices when Israel came out of Egypt, see commentary on Jer. 7:22.]

Hos 6:7

**“at Adam.”** The exact location of the city of Adam has not been confirmed, but it is almost certainly the same city of Adam that is mentioned in Joshua 3:16.

The translation of Hosea 6:7 has been hotly debated, and the debate is mainly about the meaning of the Hebrew כְּאָדָ֖ם, which has been primarily understood as being either “like Adam” (the person), “at Adam” (the city), or “like mankind.” There have been some other suggestions for the translation, such as “they have walked on my covenant like dirt,”[[3]](#footnote-13343) but these have not been well supported by other scholars. We will examine the three main possible meanings below.

A number of modern versions have the translation, “like Adam.” The main reasons for translating כְּאָדָ֖ם as “like Adam” is that the Hebrew letter kaph most naturally means “like” and not “at,” and also “like Adam” is a way that many Christians have understood the text for years (in part because it supports the theological viewpoint of Covenant Theology, although John Calvin himself favored the translation, “like men;” see *Calvin’s Commentaries*[[4]](#footnote-29870)). However, a number of things militate against the translation “like Adam.”

First, there is no other mention of a covenant with Adam anywhere in Scripture, and that is a significant problem. God was consistently angry with Israel for breaking the Mosaic Covenant and Israel’s unfaithfulness is mentioned many times in the prophetic books (including Hosea, cf. Hos. 8:1). It would be extremely unusual for God to deviate from His standard line of reproof for Israel’s breaking the Old Covenant and bring up a covenant that is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. Many times in Scripture God brings up the point that Israel broke her covenant with Him, but He just states that as a fact without saying Israel broke His covenant “like” anyone else (cf. Josh. 7:11; Judg. 2:20; 2 Kings 18:12; Ps. 78:10; Jer. 11:10; Ezek. 44:7; Hos. 8:1), so saying that Israel broke His covenant “like Adam” would be very unusual.

Also, the word “Adam” in Hosea 6:7 is not the form of the name that is used in Genesis. In Genesis, when the man Adam is spoken of, the Hebrew text places the definite article before the name. So it seems that if God was trying to say Israel sinned “like Adam,” meaning the man Adam in Genesis, He would have used the familiar form of the name “Adam” that appears in Genesis. In fact, that God does not use the familiar form of the name “Adam” is one of the reasons that some English versions have “like men” (cf. KJV), which is a meaning of “Adam” without the article.

Also against “Adam” being a man’s name is that the most natural reading of the second stanza of Hosea 6:7 uses the word “there” as a reference to a place, as in the REV translation: “They have dealt deceitfully with me there.” In fact, the Hebrew word translated “there” is so commonly used of a place that many of the English versions that have “Adam” as the person’s name also have “there” as a place name even though that produces an incongruity between the two halves of the verse (cf. the ESV: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me”). If the second stanza is referring to a place then the most natural reading of the verse is that the first stanza is too. There are rare times in Hebrew poetry when the Hebrew “there” can be the equivalent of “Look,” “See,” “Behold,” etc., (the NET is an example of that form of translation), but most scholars feel that is forcing the meaning to fit the first stanza. Also, another possible reason that the man “Adam” does not fit in Hosea 6:7 is that the specific sin spoken of in the context of Hosea 6:7-9 is murder, and Adam did not murder.

There are some English translations that have “like men” (cf. KJV) instead of “like Adam.” The main reasons for translating Hosea 6:7 as “like men” is the Hebrew prefix most naturally reads “like,” and the word “Adam” does not have the definite article as it does in Genesis when it refers to the individual, “Adam.” “Adam” without the definite article is the standard form of the word when it refers to people in general.

However, there are significant things that militate against the translation “like men.” For example, just as with the translation “like Adam,” there is no record of “men” [“humankind”] making a covenant with God. Even if they had at some point, why would Hosea mention it if it was not well-known? Even more to the point is that “humankind” does not seem to make good sense in the context of Hosea. Israel was a part of “humankind,” so to say that Israel broke a covenant like “humankind” seems to miss the point. The best way to have the text make sense would be to understand “humankind” as referring to non-Israelites, the nations. But God mentions Israel along with the pagan nations on many occasions and never refers to those nations as “humankind.” Also, as was stated above, God says many times that Israel broke her covenant with Him, but He just states it as a fact without saying Israel broke His covenant “like” anyone else. So saying that Israel broke His covenant “like mankind” would be very unusual. Also, brought up above but applicable here is the strong point that the most natural reading of the second stanza of the verse refers to a place, and not a person or persons.

In contrast to the translations “like Adam” or “like mankind,” a number of modern versions read like the REV and translate the Hebrew as “at Adam,” that is, at the city of Adam (cf. NAB, NET, NIV, RSV, JB, NJB, Moffatt Bible). Significantly, the NIV committee changed “like Adam” in the original 1984 NIV to “at Adam” in the 2011 revision.

One argument against “Adam” being a city name is that the Hebrew prefix before “Adam” most naturally reads as “like” and not “at.” However, some scholars point out that the single Hebrew letter prefix meaning “like” (the kaph כ) and “at” (the beth ב) are so similar that a copying mistake could have been easily made, while others point out that the proposed emendation is not actually necessary. Also, although some opponents to Adam being a city point out that there is no mention of idolatry at Adam anywhere else in the Bible, there is a city of Adam mentioned in Joshua 3:16.

There are a number of factors that weigh heavily in favor of “Adam” being a city. As is pointed out by Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman,[[5]](#footnote-24991) Hosea 6:7-9 fit together as a unit, and in any case they are each about places. Hosea 6:7 mentions “Adam,” Hosea 6:8 mentions “Gilead,” and Hosea 6:9 mentions “Shechem.” Also, as was pointed out above, the second stanza of Hosea 6:7 most naturally reads “Adam” as a place name, as in the NIV: “they were unfaithful to me there.”

Also, the “covenant” that Israel is regularly accused of breaking, as was pointed out above, is the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Hos. 8:1), and the Israelites did not specifically break that covenant “like Adam” because the Mosaic Covenant was 2,500 years after Adam, nor could they break it “like mankind” because God did not make the Mosaic Covenant with mankind. Also as was pointed out above, although Israel broke God’s covenant in many ways, the specific sin in the context is murder and Adam did not commit murder. On the other hand, the Israelites could have easily broken the Mosaic Covenant at the city of Adam, just as they were breaking it all over the nation of Israel.

A city named “Adam” is mentioned in Joshua 3:16, and it makes sense that it would be the same city as is mentioned in Hosea. The *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*[[6]](#footnote-14988) says that Adam is a “…Transjordanian city, described as ‘beside Zarethan’ south of the meeting of the Jabbok and Jordan rivers and modern Tell ed-Damiyah, where the Jordan’s waters miraculously arose upstream from the Israelites, allowing them to cross the river on dry land (Josh. 3:16). Hosea denounces certain priests’ disloyalty to Yahweh and murderous activities at the city (Hos. 6:7).”

Good evidence that the “Adam” in Hosea 6:7 is the same city as the city of Adam in Joshua 3:16 is that it perfectly fits the geographical information given in Hosea. According to Hosea 6:9, the murderous priests were on their way to Shechem. Shechem was a well-known place of worship in Israel and it would have drawn people such as the idolatrous priests mentioned in Hosea (see commentary on Hos. 6:9, “Shechem”). The priests were coming from Gilead in the Transjordan (that is, east of the Jordan River), and would cross the Jordan River from east to west at the ford near the city of Adam on their way to Shechem. The commentary in The Interpreter’s Bible points out that both the translations “like Adam” and “like human beings” have problems. Then it goes on to say, “But we may consider Adam as a place name, and read ‘at [i.e., ב for כ] Adam.’ In this case, Adam would be understood to be the well-known ford of the Jordan (cf. Josh. 3:16); people going from Gilead to Shechem would normally cross the river there,”[[7]](#footnote-28653) Thus, what Hosea 6:7 points out is that when the evil priests who lived in Gilead were going to Shechem, they had to go by the city of Adam to cross the Jordan River and they would have sinned at Adam just as they had back in their hometown of Gilead.

In conclusion, although each possible translation of Hosea 6:7 has its proponents, the weight of evidence seems to most strongly support that Hosea is referring to the city of Adam, where the bloodthirsty priests of Israel broke God’s covenant.

**“dealt deceitfully.”** The Hebrew word is *bagad* (#0898 בּגד), and it means to “deal treacherously with; deal deceitfully with, be unfaithful to.” It is used a lot in interpersonal relationships of people who were deceitful or unfaithful to another. In this case, the people of Israel were unfaithful to God at the city of Adam, and broke their covenant with Him.

Hos 6:8

**“Gilead is a city.”** Although the common use of “Gilead” was of a region (the region east of the Jordan River south of the Sea of Galilee and north of the Dead Sea), the statement that “Gilead” in Hosea 6:8 “is a city” means the reference here is most likely to the city of Ramoth-gilead in northeastern Gilead.

Hos 6:9

**“so a band of priests murder.”** The priests would have committed many crimes, with “murder” being one of the most heinous. Historically, religiously overzealous and greedy priests have committed murder or framed people so that they were murdered as we see in the Four Gospels (John 7:1, 19, 25), and which is exemplified in movies such as The Three Musketeers in which the coldhearted and powerful Cardinal Richelieu set up the murder of his enemies.

**“on the road to Shechem.”** Shechem was a well-known place of worship in Israel, and it became a center for the perverted worship in Israel during Hosea’s time, which is why priests from Gilead in the Transjordan would make a pilgrimage there. Shechem was the very first place mentioned in Genesis where Abraham stopped when he entered Canaan (Gen. 12:6). After the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua gathered all the tribes to Shechem and cut a covenant with the people that they would serve Yahweh (Josh. 24:1, 24-28). Shechem was a Levitical city and city of refuge (Josh. 20:7, 21; 1 Chron. 6:66-67). It was the city in which Rehoboam, son of Solomon, chose to be crowned king but was rejected, the people of the ten northern tribes rejecting Rehoboam and making Jeroboam their king, who then made Shechem the first capital city of the new nation of Israel (1 Kings 12:1-25). After the destruction of Israel by Assyria, Shechem remained an important city and according to Josephus was the leading city of the Samaritans.[[8]](#footnote-17026)

Hos 6:11

**“a harvest *of judgment*.”** Like Israel, Judah has sinned, so Judah too will reap what she has sown. The NET nuances the verse for clarity, and reads, “I have appointed a time to reap judgment for you also, O Judah!”

**“When I restore the fortunes of my people**,**”** It is unfortunate that the chapter ends here, in the middle of a sentence. To get the whole thought, the reader must continue into Hosea 7:1.

**Hosea Chapter 7**

Hos 7:14

**“slash themselves for grain.”** The Israelites had forsaken Yahweh and turned to pagan practices to increase the fertility of the land. It was a Canaanite practice, mainly done by the pagan priests of Baal, to cut themselves so that the blood fell on the ground to elicit fertility for the crops.

[For more on people slashing and cutting themselves, see commentary on 1 Kings 18:28.]

**Hosea Chapter 8**

Hos 8:1

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Hos 8:4

**“with the result that it will be cut off.”** The phrase “cut off” often means “destroyed,” and it can have that meaning here as well. This sentence seems very unclear, so some English versions try to make sense of it by amending it, but that is not necessary once the sentence is properly understood. The scholars disagree on the strict interpretation of the verse, but the end result of Israel’s idolatry was the same: both Israel and the idols themselves were “cut off;” Israel was destroyed and the wealth was “cut off” from them. The verse makes sense if we understand the consequences for evil and God’s uses of irony (sarcasm), and also the possible use of the figure of speech amphibologia (double meaning). The people used their silver and gold to make idols, which were an abomination to God and which caused them to be conquered (“cut off”) by enemies, and also had the result of their silver and gold being taken (cut off) from them.

The phrase “with the result that it will be cut off” applies equally to “with the result that it (Israel) will be cut off,” and “with the result that it (the silver and gold) will be cut off.” In fact, it is likely that God authored the text the way He did with the idea that both Israel and their silver and gold would be cut off (thus the amphibologia). Also, although the Hebrew grammar allows for the last phrase to be a purpose clause or a result clause, its being a result clause fits the context, the scope of Scripture, and what actually happened historically much more naturally than trying to make it a purpose clause. Israel should have known that their making idols would result in both their destruction and the enemy taking their silver and gold from them. God had stated quite clearly in the Law of Moses that people who worshiped idols would be cut off, destroyed (cf. Lev. 20:3-5; Deut. 4:3; 6:14-15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 11:16-17; 17:2-5; 29:25-28; 30:17-18; 31:16-18).

Hos 8:5

**“Let Samaria throw out their calf idol!”** The calf idol had been set up during the reign of Jeroboam I, the first king of Israel, about 940 BC (1 Kings 12:28-29). Hosea prophesied over a long period, but the calf idol had likely stood for some 200 years when Hosea made this prophecy.

Hos 8:9

**“lovers.”** The Hebrew word “lovers” is masculine, implying that Ephraim is a prostitute who hired herself out to the men of Assyria.

Hos 8:12

**“as something foreign.”** Like the “foreign” woman of Proverbs, to the Israelites, the words of God were “foreign” and therefore unacceptable.

**Hosea Chapter 9**

Hos 9:1

**“Do not rejoice, Israel, with jubilation like the nations!”** Israel was worshiping pagan gods, and attributed to them the blessings that actually came from Yahweh (Hos. 2:5, 8), and so they rejoiced “like the nations” at the grain harvest, honoring pagan gods.

**“You love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor.”** A prostitute could be paid with grain, and God is saying that Israel committed prostitution against Him and served pagan gods expecting to be paid by a bountiful harvest. Also, however, it was common for prostitutes to show up at threshing floors. They knew the men would generally be away from their families, and they could pay right away with grain. If the guard was a servant and not the landowner, they might be able to be enticed to hire a prostitute for some grain they would sneak from the pile, and no one would have known it.

Hos 9:3

**“They will not live in Yahweh’s land.”** Although God gave the Promised Land for Israel to live in, he did not give them the land, God owned the land. Furthermore, He warned them that if they abandoned Him and His laws, the blessing of the land would be removed and the land would not sustain its inhabitants (Lev. 18:28; 20:22), which we see in Hosea 9:2. In other places, God said that if Israel abandoned Him they would be scattered among foreign people (cf. Lev. 26:33; Deut. 4:27; 28:64).

**“Ephraim will return to Egypt.”** In this context, “Egypt” refers to exile and bondage, not the literal country of Egypt. The last sentence expresses how they will “return to Egypt”—they will be taken as captives to Assyria, which occurred in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6, 18, 23).

Hos 9:4

**“They will not pour out wine offerings.”** They will not pour out wine offerings to Yahweh because they will be exiled away from Judah and will be in foreign lands.

**“will be to them like the bread of mourners.”** The sacrifices of idolatrous Israel done in exile will be unclean. The bread (food) of mourners was unclean (Deut. 26:14).

Hos 9:6

**“even if they have fled from destruction, Egypt will gather them up.”** The Israelites who escape death from the attacks by foreign powers are not safe; they will be gathered up and exiled, and die in exile. Nettles and thorns will take over the places where they had lived.

Hos 9:7

**“have come…have come.”** These are prophetic perfects.[[9]](#footnote-12883) The days of visitation and reckoning will come.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“The prophet is a fool, and the man who is *moved by the* spirit is insane.”** The prophet and man of the spirit in this verse are the false prophets who were leading Israel astray. Thus, they were “fools” and “insane” because they led people away from Yahweh and directed them into pagan worship, which would bring God’s judgment upon them.

Hos 9:8

**“The prophet is a watchman.”** This verse is extremely difficult in Hebrew, and beyond that, there are variant texts. The difficulty is reflected in the different English translations. The translation in the REV is one possibility, that the prophet is to be a watchman for Yahweh, and yet in Hosea’s time, there was hostility toward true prophets and traps laid for them.

**“on behalf of my God.”** This could also be “along with my God.”

Hos 9:9

**“as in the days of Gibeah.”** Although the text does not say exactly what days, and although there is some scholarly debate about it, conservative Bible scholars believe that the most fitting time described by “the days of Gibeah” was apparently very soon after Joshua’s generation died out when the men of Gibeah wanted to assault a Levite traveling through their town but instead ended up raping a woman to death. Then, as bad if not worse, the rest of the tribe of Benjamin defended the men of Gibeah and went to war with Israel rather than bring the men of Gibeah to justice. The account is in Judges 19-21, and it explains what happened in Gibeah and what happened to the tribe of Benjamin. Gibeah is again mentioned in Hosea 10:9.

Hos 9:10

**“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness.”** Finding grapes in the desert is a pleasant and unexpected surprise. God is saying that early on in Israel’s history, He expected to have a wonderful relationship with them. This is confirmed by the next phrase, that God found the founders of Israel (the “fathers”) as first-ripe figs, which were highly prized.

**“but they came to Baal-peor.”** The infamous incident involving Baal-peor is recorded in Numbers 25:1-11, and mentioned in Deuteronomy 4:3.

**“Shame.”** God calls the idol at Baal-peor “Shame” here, a circumlocution for the idol’s actual name.

Hos 9:11

**“their Glory will fly away like a bird.”** The word “glory” likely refers to two things here. First and foremost, Israel’s “Glory” was Yahweh (cf. 1 Sam. 4:21-22). Of all the peoples of earth, Yahweh had chosen Israel as His people, and He had protected and sustained them in spite of their unfaithfulness, for many centuries. But now God’s patience was coming to an end, and with it Israel’s occupation of the Promised Land. Israel was about to be attacked and deported to various places in Assyria. Without their Glory, their God, Israel would have none of the blessings that the presence of God brings, such as conception, healthy pregnancies, and healthy children.

Also in the verse is “glory” with the sense of it being Ephraim’s wealth and prosperity, but that does not seem to be the primary meaning in this context. The Hebrew text, which only has capital letters, just reads “GLORY,” and the reader will see all the possible meanings. English has “G” and “g,” and so the translator must make a choice between the two, and “Glory” seems to be the primary meaning in the context.

As we know from history, Judah fared no better than Israel. The sin and hard-heartedness of Judah drove God away from Judah just like the sin and hard-heartedness of Israel drove God away from Israel. Israel was conquered and taken away from the Promised Land by Assyria, and has not yet returned, and Judah was conquered and carried away from the Promised Land by the Babylonians, but when the Persians conquered Babylon they did return to their land (see Ezra and Nehemiah). Just as the Glory left Israel, it left Judah (see commentary on Ezek. 9:3).

Hos 9:13

**“Ephraim will bring out his children to the slaughterer.”** When the Assyrians conquered city after city in Israel, many people who left the cities were killed, although many were taken into captivity.

Hos 9:14

**“Give them, Yahweh.”** Although this has the possible overtones of a prophet who has been persecuted and is frustrated and is awaiting God’s promised judgment, what he says is not different than what was foretold to happen to the people when they turned to idols and abandoned Yahweh.

**Hosea Chapter 10**

Hos 10:1

**“fertile.”** The Hebrew word describes abundant growth and much fruit.

**“standing-stones.”** Most standing-stones were set up as part of the worship of pagan gods, and that is the context here. God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways, and God commanded that they be destroyed.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

Hos 10:5

**“Beth-aven.”** “Beth-aven” means “House of Wickedness,” and was a derogatory term the prophet used for the town of Bethel (Beth-el), which means “House of God,” but which had the golden calf idol that Jeroboam had made. See commentary on Hosea 4:15.

**“it will be taken *from them* into exile.”** It was a common custom for a conquering nation to take back home with them the gods of the defeated nation, as we see here in Hosea 10:5 (cf. Isa. 46:1-2; Jer. 48:7; 49:3; Dan. 11:8), and this was especially true if they were made of valuable metals. When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon conquered Judah, he took away the Temple vessels, because they were valuable but also because there wasn’t any god in the Temple to take away to show that the God of Judah had been defeated (2 Kings 24:13; 25:13-15; 2 Chron. 36:7, 18). When the Assyrians conquered Israel, they took the golden calves of Israel back to Assyria with them.

The literal Hebrew is that the calf “had been taken from them,” using the prophetic perfect idiom to express a future certainty.

[For more on the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

Hos 10:8

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Hos 10:9

**“you have sinned from the days of Gibeah.”** The “days of Gibeah” seem to be the days when the men of Gibeah wanted to assault a Levite traveling through their town and ended up raping a woman to death (Judg. 19-21; see commentary on Hos. 9:9).

Hos 10:10

**“are bound up.”** Like prisoners.

**“for their two transgressions.”** What the transgressions are is not clear. Some translations suggest “double transgressions.”

Hos 10:12

**“in righteousness.”** In this context, “righteousness” is doing what is right and just to other people and in the sight of God (see commentary on Matt. 5:6). God is telling the people to live in a just and godly way toward God and others.

Hos 10:15

**“At daybreak the king of Israel will be destroyed.”** Armies typically started battles at daybreak, and that seems to be alluded to here, but this time God will not deliver Israel, the king of Israel will be destroyed. It is not mentioned who the king is. It could be Hoshea the last king of Israel, but that is uncertain.

**Hosea Chapter 11**

Hos 11:1

**“and called my son out of Egypt.”** This phrase is quoted in Matthew 2:15. God’s children, Israel, were called out of Egypt at the Exodus, and they were a type of Christ who was called out of Egypt.

Hos 11:2

**“they called.”** “They called” is the reading of the Hebrew text; God called Israel through His prophets. The Septuagint and the Syriac read “I called,” and some modern versions follow that alternate reading. It is hard to know which is original, but since Hosea 11:1 reads “I,” changing the “I” to “they” in Hosea 11:2 is more difficult and therefore more likely original. The prophets were consistently attempting to call Israel back to God, but without success. Israel went further and further away from God until they were finally conquered by Assyria and deported from the land of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17:6-23).

Hos 11:6

**“bars.”** The “bars” were strong wooden beams that were placed behind the doors of the gate so they could not be opened and could withstand pounding from the outside without giving way. Those bars were the origin of the shout “Bar the doors!” when an enemy would approach.

Hos 11:8

**“How can I make you like Admah...Zeboiim.”** Admah and Zeboiim were two cities close to Sodom and Gomorrah which were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Deut. 29:23).

Hos 11:12

**“And Judah is unruly against God.”** The last sentences in Hosea 11:12 have been taken in totally different directions by the translators: that Judah is faithful to God (cf. CJB, ESV, NET, NLT), or that Judah is not faithful to God (cf. JPS, NASB, NIV). The historical evidence from Hosea and the historical books of the Bible is that Judah was not faithful to God. Although many translators have been influenced by Hosea 1:7, that verse does not say Judah was faithful to God, only that God would rescue Judah, which He did when the Assyrians attacked. But Judah is shown to be unfaithful to God in Hosea (cf. Hos. 5:12-13; 6:4, 10-11; 8:14; 10:11; 12:2), so it would be incongruous for Hosea 11:12 to suddenly say Judah had been faithful. The translation by Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman sees the text as saying Judah is faithful, but not to God. Their translation reads “Judah still wanders with the holy gods. He is faithful to the holy gods.”[[10]](#footnote-30641) In other words, Judah is faithful to idol gods, not God.

**Hosea Chapter 12**

Hos 12:2

**“a lawsuit.”** See commentary on Hosea 4:1.

Hos 12:7

**“dishonest balances.”** Unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag or had measuring cups of slightly different sizes that only they could easily tell apart so that they bought a lot and sold a little. But that kind of dishonest dealing is an abomination to Yahweh (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16).

[For more on trading using honest balances, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

**Hosea Chapter 13**

Hos 13:1

**“when he became guilty through Baal, he died.”** There is a lot about this verse that is uncertain, for example, does “Ephraim” refer to the one tribe here in Hosea, or does it refer to the Kingdom of Israel, as it often does? Also, the reference to Ephraim becoming guilty through Baal, does that refer to a specific event, or is it a sweeping generalization about the trouble Ephraim got into due to worshiping Baal? This seems to be more of a widely sweeping statement than a reference to any single event, and it makes the general point that when people abandoned Yahweh they brought trouble on themselves.

Hos 13:3

**“they will be like the morning mist.”** These four metaphors all make the same point, and reinforce each other: idolaters will have a short existence. The metaphors are all more weighty than they might at first appear, however. Many idolaters live long lives and are powerful people with accumulated wealth, but they will all be gone one day, with no trace of them left. The morning mist and dew are heavy enough to water and refresh the land, but soon they are gone. Similarly, the chaff on the threshing floor can pile up and be substantial, but when the storms come it blows away and is gone. Smoke from a cooking fire in the house may be thick and problematic, but eventually, it goes out the window.

Hos 13:4

**“besides me there is no savior.”** Yahweh is the only true God. The Bible has many verses that say there is only one God, “Yahweh.”

[For more on Yahweh being the only God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son,” point 11, and commentary on Deut. 6:4.]

Hos 13:14

**“I will ransom them from the power of Sheol.”** The scholars are divided as to whether this is a statement, as in the REV and as is implied by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:54-55, or a question, “Will I ransom them from the power of the grave?” Although it is inserted abruptly into the text, that it is a statement of Hope seems to be preferred, although many scholars disagree.[[11]](#footnote-27690)

**“I will redeem them from death.”** Contrary to popular Christian opinion, people do not die and go to heaven or “hell.” People die and are in the ground awaiting the resurrection and Day of Judgment, and those events are still future. The Old Testament has a number of verses about God raising the dead (cf. Deut. 32:39; Job. 19:25-27; Ps. 71:20; Isa. 26:19; 66:14; Ezek. 37:12-14; Dan. 12:2, 13; and Hos. 13:14). The New Testament does also (cf. Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; 14:14; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:20-22, 42-49, 52; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 20:4-13).

[For more on people dying and being dead in the ground, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Hos 13:15

**“east wind.”** The “east wind” was the term for a wind that usually came off the desert and was hot, dry, unrelenting, and very uncomfortable (cf. Jer. 4:11; 13:24; 18:17; Jon. 4:8).

**Hosea Chapter 14**

Hos 14:2

**“so we offer our lips like bulls.”** This phrase is very literal and contains a metonymy and a simile that we must understand to understand the verse. The metonymy is that “lips” is put for the words that come from the lips, especially praise and worship. The simile is “like bulls,” i.e., that instead of sacrificing bulls on the altar, the person offers praise from his lips as his sacrifice to God. Many versions pick up on the meaning and nuance the translation for clarity. For example, the NJB reads: “instead of bulls we will dedicate to you our lips.” The NET reads, “that we may offer the praise of our lips as sacrificial bulls.” It is worth mentioning that the Septuagint has “fruit” instead of bulls, and many English versions pick up on that translation. So, for example, the NRSV reads, “we will offer the fruit of our lips.” However, there is no compelling reason to reject the Masoretic Hebrew text, because its reading makes sense.

1. J. Andrew Dearman, The Book of Hosea [NICOT], 105-06. [↑](#footnote-ref-29913)
2. Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Hosea [AB], 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-21414)
3. Douglas K. Stuart, Hosea-Jonah [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13343)
4. John Owen, trans., Twelve Minor Prophets: Hosea by John Calvin, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-29870)
5. Andersen and Freedman, Hosea [AB], 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-24991)
6. Sakenfeld, New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. “Adam” [↑](#footnote-ref-14988)
7. Buttrick, Interpreter’s Bible, brackets and parentheses theirs. [↑](#footnote-ref-28653)
8. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 11.8.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-17026)
9. Cf. J. Andrew Dearman, The Book of Hosea [NICOT]. [↑](#footnote-ref-12883)
10. Andersen and Freedman, Hosea [AB], 593. [↑](#footnote-ref-30641)
11. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-27690)