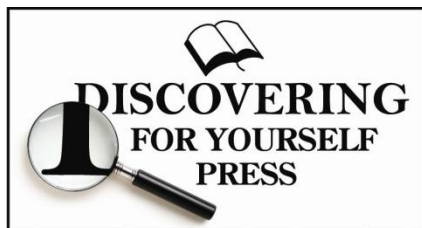


Hosea

The Persistent
Love of God



Moline, IL
www.d4yp.com

Notes and Comments by John Sullivan

This journal belongs to:

Hosea

The Persistent Love of God

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*I will show my love to the one I called "Not my loved one."
I will say to those called "Not my people,"
"You are my people";
and they will say "You are my God."*

Hosea 2:23b

Hosea

The Persistent Love of God

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Footnotes (continued)

as caused many heartaches for themselves. They took many of his blessings and either forgot that they came from God or, in some cases, actually accredited them and devoted them to idols. The more we know God, the more we trust him and the more we acknowledge him.

Notes

Footnotes (continued)

- tribes, rather than in just one area. Ephraim's pride and fierceness that they once boasted about is addressed in chapters 12 & 13. Ephraim was now reduced to a very low state because of their idolatry.
- ⁶ *Hosea 7:11* mentions the fact that Israel turned to the reigning super powers of Assyria and Egypt for help, an action that is also referred to in *5:13; 8:9; 11:11; and 12:1*. Even though, time after time, God had shown his people that if they would turn to him he has the power to help them overcome all odds, they often tried to seek help from other kings and countries. (See *2 Kings 16* as an example.) Panic often leads us to trust the wrong things. *Hosea 14:3* shows the faithful words that Israel would eventually proclaim after learning the costly lesson of relying on worldly strength rather than God.
- ⁷ Three times in *Hosea* God said that his people had forgotten him (*2:18; 8:14; 13:6*). The ideas of "*forgetting God*" and its opposite "*remembering God*" are mentioned dozens of times in Scripture. Some of them involve forgetting or remembering what God has done or said (*Deut. 4:9; Psalm 103:2; Psalm 105:5*, for instances). But many of them have the deeper thought of completely forgetting God (*Jer. 2:32; Deut. 8:10 – 20; Ecc. 12:1*, for instances). It's impossible for us to know exactly how that makes God feel, but we understand it well enough to know what we want to do.
- ⁸ Does God love or hate sinners? Many Christians might be surprised or even offended by Scriptures like this one along with *Psalm 5:5; 11:5* and *Prov. 3:32; 6:16 – 19; 11:20; 16:5*. It might seem like a complete contradiction with other Scriptures like *Romans 8:35-38, Romans 5:8; John 3:16; and 1 John 4:8, 16*. While God is love and he wants his people to be totally secure in the unending reliability of his love, he has also clearly communicated that you do not want to let un-repentant sin put you in a position that he punishes you, opposes you, and even rejects you.
- ⁹ Verse 4 mentions acknowledging God, something Israel forgot to do in their pride. This concept is referred to 9 times in 8 verses in *Hosea* (*2:8; 2:20; 4:1; 5:4; 6:3; 6:6; 8:2; and 13:4*). Another passage that you might be familiar with is *Prov. 3:5-6*. You might enjoy taking a personal Bible study day reading these Scriptures along with others you can find on the subject, writing out their statements, and seeing what God is saying to you in them. The English word "*acknowledge*" literally means to "*admit knowledge of*." So acknowledging God is closely related to confessing him. It is connected to the Biblical emphasis of knowing God and takes it to the additional step of admitting to yourself, to God, and to others your awareness of how much he blesses your life. Israel didn't do that, and it broke God's heart as well

Hosea

The Persistent Love of God

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*I will show my love to the one I called "Not my loved one."
I will say to those called "Not my people,"
"You are my people";
and they will say "You are my God."
Hosea 2:23b*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of
him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of
God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have
received mercy.
1 Peter 2:9 – 10*

Map Palestine During Hosea's Time



Footnotes (continued)

the difficulty we have created to be loved, which in turn helps us appreciate God's love even more. (See also the fifth paragraph on p. 9 of this journal about the use of the word "*prostitution*" to describe the spiritual unfaithfulness associated with idolatry). In the New Testament, *2 Cor. 11:2* and *Rev. 21:2*, refer to the church as the bride of Christ.

- ² It would be quite natural to feel concern for their children. It shows the impact that infidelity can have on children. But God's emphasis throughout the story is the result of the change from "*Not Loved*" to "*Loved*" and from "*Not My People*" to "*My People*." While nothing else is said about these children, it is not difficult to imagine how they could have encouraged many people with their testimony. (Isaiah, who lived at the same time, also had children with symbolic, though less tragic, names. See *Is. 7:3; 8:3; and 8:18.*)
- ³ The Samaritans (named after the capital city, Samaria) of the New Testament times were descendants of what happened when Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom. Assyria brought in other cultures and had them intermarry with the Israelites. By the time of Jesus, Samaritans considered themselves as worshippers of Yahweh, instead of idols, but their center of worship was Mt. Gerizim, rather than Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. The Jews' animosity towards them was on the basis of impure ancestry and also on religious principles. Jesus began breaking down that particular "*wall of hostility*" with his interaction with the Samaritan woman (*John 4*) and with the Parable of the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10*). Philip continued the reunion process with his successful evangelistic effort in *Acts 8*.
- ⁴ The prophets, such as Hosea, refer to many types of injustices, some that we might consider more serious than others. They often relate to the internal sin of greed. Such is the case with Hosea's references to dishonest scales (*12:7*) and the reference in this chapter (*5:10*) to "*moving boundary stones*". That was the greedy practice of attempting to cheat someone out of their land, an offense that was harshly dealt with in the Law of Moses (*Deut. 19:14 and 27:17*) and viewed as a detestable action (*Prov. 22:28; 23:10; Job 24:2; Micah 2:2; and Ezek. 45:8 – 9*, for instances). God is serious about letting our greed allow us to take advantage of others.
- ⁵ Israel is referred to in *5:5*, and frequently throughout *Hosea*, by the name of their largest tribe, Ephraim, who was Joseph's second son (*Genesis 48*). He was picked by Jacob to be treated as one of his sons. So the "*12 Tribes of Israel*" always have the two sons of Joseph listed, rather than Joseph. Levi also is not listed as one of the 12 tribes since his descendants were the priests and Levites, and they lived throughout the territories of the twelve
(continued on the next page)

Resources

- Alexander, David and Pat *Erdmans' Handbook of the Bible*. Lion Publishing, 1973.
- Hailey, Homer *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Baker Book House Company, 1972.
- Halley, Henry *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Zondervan, 2000.
- Hamilton, Mark (editor) *The Transforming Word*, Abilene Christian University Press, 2009.
- May, Herbert G. (editor) *Oxford Bible Atlas*. Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Tenney, Merrill C. (General Editor) *Pictorial Bible Dictionary*. Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.

Websites and Apps

- Biblegateway.com* A free searchable tool with the Bible in multiple translations and languages, along with many other Bible-study aids.
- BibleProject.com* A series of free Bible videos on books of the Bible. Watch, for instance, the video on *Hosea*.
- gotquestions.org* A searchable tool designed to try to give reasonable answers to Bible questions. Just type in a question and see what you think about their answer. You may not always agree with their answer, but it will usually make you think. For instance, consider their response to: "Does God Hate?" or "What is Moving Boundary Stones?"
- YouVersion Bible App* A free download of the Bible in many versions to make the Word of God available on your phone or other devices. The audio reading is especially helpful.

Footnotes

- ¹ Other prophets besides Hosea refer to God as husband, with Israel being his wife. *Isaiah 54:5 – 10* speaks beautifully of God's desire to be reunited with his people, his wife. *Jeremiah 2:2* records God's own words, reminding the people of the loving devotion they once had as his bride, but regrettably had abandoned. In *Ezekiel 16* God also spoke directly to the people in very graphic and somewhat disturbing images about the adultery and prostitution that described God's wife, Israel. **Warning:** *Ezekiel 16* is a dark chapter to read, but it again shows (as God's revelation through Hosea does)

Hosea Introduction

God wants to give us the power to grasp his love (**Ephesians 3:17 – 19**).

One way to get a better picture of the enormity and persistence of that love is to see how challenging we as individuals and as a group have made it to be loved.

Hosea's personal life and the revelation God gave him combine to give us a dramatic visual of the persistence of God's love in spite of our persistence in trying to make it difficult to be loved.

Imagine what it would feel like to be married to someone who is frequently unfaithful to you. Unfortunately, some of you do not have to imagine that; you have actually experienced it. We know that marriage is a covenant – a promise to be faithful to one another. Hosea knew what it was like for that not to happen. Imagine also the heartache God feels about having a covenant relationship with his people, and they are frequently unfaithful to him. In all honesty, we all have to admit that we have made our contribution to that heartache. Most of the text in this book is God himself speaking, giving us an intimate view into his perspective of having an unfaithful loved one.

Both of these examples of unfaithfulness are vividly portrayed in the life and writings of Hosea. His wife was unfaithful to him, and some of the children she bore were not his. That would have caused Hosea a lot of heartache, and there would have been a strong temptation to be bitter. Yet, Hosea offered his love to her and to the children in the same way God offers his love to us.

Since the beginning of the Divided Kingdom, which started after the death of Solomon around 975 BC, the Northern Kingdom with its 10 tribes was referred to as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom with its 2 tribes was referred to as Judah. Israel is also sometimes referred to by the name of its largest tribe, Ephraim, or by the name of their capital city, Samaria. So whenever you read about God talking through Hosea to Israel or Ephraim or Samaria, that is always referring to the Northern Kingdom, whereas Judah refers to the Southern Kingdom.

From its inception, the Northern Kingdom was known for its idol worship, especially the detestable worship of Baal. The people in Jerusalem were also tempted, and sometimes succumbed to the temptation, to mix worship of God with the worship of Baal.

Seeing God's persistent love throughout the history of our humanity's relationship with him, both as a humanity as a whole and as our own individual's personal history, helps us grasp just a little more about how enormous his love is. Look for that as you study this book.

(continued on the next page)

Introduction (continued)

This journal is not designed to be a detailed commentary on each verse (see p. 29 for a short list of commentaries and references), but it is set up in a way that will hopefully help you know your Bible and know your God better. If you do this with a group, the thought questions can be used as some of the discussion questions for your group.

Also, this journal is set up with 5 devotional readings, each dealing with 2 or 3 chapters from *Hosea*. That could be used as a one-devotional reading-per-week pace. But some might prefer a slower or faster pace. Obviously, go at your own pace.

NOTE: Some of this reading is not the easiest or most comforting reading in the Bible. It was not designed for that. It was a time when the call for repentance was the need of the hour. Hopefully, the comments in this journal will help some in guiding your reading, but they are, at best, the side dish. The main dish is the Word of God as found in this prophecy, so read it thoroughly, repeatedly, and completely. As you encounter difficult sections, faithfully go to God for His Spirit to lead you into a deeper understanding of it. He's good at that!

God bless you as you continue to know His Word better and know Him better!

John Sullivan
September 2025

NOTE: Here are some suggestions before you start the chapter-by-chapter analysis of this prophecy:

- 1) Read the whole book in one setting. You might enjoy having a Bible App read it to you out loud while you follow along in your Bible (NOT just while driving in your car).
- 2) Study the "*Background of Hosea's Prophecy*" on the next page.
- 3) Use the "*Glossary of Names and Places*" starting on page 25 as you go through the reading to help you better understand the references to them in the prophet's words.

Lo-Ruhamah	1:6	Gomer's daughter; literally "Not loved" or "Not pitied."
Memphis	9:6	Ancient capital city of Egypt.
Mizpah	5:1	Literally "watchtower." A name given to various locations in the Bible, so the snare mentioned in Hosea is unidentified.
Ramah	5:8	Several locations in Israel throughout the Old Testament history bore this name. The only reference by Hosea says to sound the horn there.
Samaria	6 x in <i>Hosea</i>	The name given in the Bible to both the capital city of the Northern Kingdom and also to the country containing it.
Shalman	10:14	Probably a shortened version of the name Shalmaneser, the title of five Assyrian kings, one of which conquered Samaria. (2 Kings 17 & 18)
Shechem	6:9	An ancient city about 30 miles north of Jerusalem with a rich history (<i>Gen. 12:6-7</i> and <i>Josh. 24:32</i> , for instance). But in Hosea's time, it was yet another place of injustice.
Tabor	5:1	A small mountain SW of the Sea of Galilee; one of the many places of idolatry and immorality in Hosea's day.
Tyre	9:13	An ancient and important seacoast town spoken of favorably by God through Hosea. David and Solomon had a good relationship with Tyre, and Solomon relied on the King of Tyre for resources to build the temple.
Uzziah	1:1	Also known as Azariah. Became king of Judah at 16, around 767 BC, and reigned for 52 years (2 Chron. 26; 2 Kings 15). Mostly known for his faithfulness with one prideful exception at the end of his life. It was in the year that Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the LORD (Is. 6).
Valley of Achor	2:15	Literally "Valley of Trouble." Located on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, where Achan was punished (<i>Josh. 7</i>). Hosea promised that the "Valley of Trouble" will become the "Door of Hope."
Valley of Jezreel	1:5	The region from the town of Jezreel towards the Jordan River.
Zeboiim	11:8	Also spelled Zeboyim. See the note for Admah.

Appendix 2 (Cont.)

Hezekiah	1:1	A faithful king of Judah who reformed Israel from the wicked practices of his father Ahaz, around 716 BC. (2 Chron. 29 – 31 and Isaiah 36 – 39).
Israel	34 x in <i>Hosea</i>	The other name for Jacob (Gen. 32), which became the name for God's people in general and later the name for the Northern Kingdom.
Jacob	12:2	Abraham's grandson whose sons and grandsons became the 12 tribes of Israel.
Jehoash (or Joash)	1:1	Although there was a faithful king of Judah with this same name, this reference is to the wicked king of Israel who was Jeroboam II's father (2 Kings 13).
Jehu	1:4	Northern Kingdom king who destroyed Ahab at God's command (2 Kings 9 & 10). He even temporarily got rid of Baal worship, although he also participated in his own wicked ways, and his wicked dynasty lasted for over 100 years.
Jeroboam	1:1	The king of the Northern Kingdom during Hosea's ministry. We refer to him as Jeroboam II, because he lived 150 years after Jeroboam I, around 782 – 753 BC (2 Kings 14:23 – 29).
Jezreel	1:4, 11; 2:22	Hosea's oldest son, and also the city that played a role in Jehu's execution of Ahab's family (2 Kings 9).
Jotham	1:1	One of the faithful kings of Judah, around 740 BC (2 Chron. 27).
Judah	14 x in <i>Hosea</i>	One of Jacob's sons and one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Along with Benjamin, one of the 2 tribes that became the Southern Kingdom. Judah's name became synonymous with the Southern Kingdom.
Lebanon	14:5-7	100-mile long mountain range north of Israel known for its beautiful cedar trees.
Lo-Ammi	1:9	Gomer's third child; literally "Not my people."

Preliminary Study

Background of Hosea's Prophecy

Idolatry, Immorality, and Injustices of Unfaithful Israel

God's heartache for his people and punishment for their sins as found in Hosea's prophecy was not the result of recent, momentary, or minor offenses. It was the result of centuries of repeated idolatry, immorality, and injustices.

NOTE: This discussion is somewhat of a one-sided picture of God's people, who also had many amazing examples of righteousness, gracefulness, and love. But it does show that God's words to and through his prophet Hosea had a backdrop of ages of persistent sin.

Hosea was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Amos. His 20 or so years of ministry probably started around 750 BC. (See Appendix 1 for a list of Israel's prophet's and kings.) All three of those prophets pointed out the rampant sins of idolatry, immorality, and injustices along with God's call to help them change. At that time the Assyrians were the world dominating power. By the time of Isaiah (chapters 36 – 39 of his book), Assyria had already conquered the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and was threatening the Southern Kingdom, Judah. Isaiah helped Judah's King Hezekiah stay faithful, and God rescued tiny Jerusalem from powerful Assyria in an amazing David-versus-Goliath type of victory. In Hosea's prophecy, that destruction of the Northern Kingdom evidently had not yet happened, so God was pleading with them that there was still time to turn to him.

So, note that the name "*Israel*" in Hosea's prophecy refers to what we today often call the Northern Kingdom. It is their unfaithfulness that is the subject and cause of alarm from God. Their history from their beginning is almost completely exemplified by:

I. Idolatry.

Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom set up golden calves in the towns of Bethel and Dan for the people to worship (**1 Kings 12:25 – 33**). That evolved into the worship of Baal by the time of the 22-year reign of the famous Northern King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (**1 Kings 16:29 – 33**). It was at that time that the prophet Elijah did his amazing confrontations with the prophets of Baal. That idolatry continued, with few exceptions, throughout all of the northern kings right down to Hosea's time when Jeroboam II was king. Their final destruction by Assyria, 721 – 722 BC, is not mentioned in Hosea's writings, so that might have happened right after his prophecies. Read **2 Kings 17** which gives details about that event and especially notes idolatry as the main cause for their downfall.

(continued on the next page)

Meanwhile, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, had some moments of idolatry and some moments of genuine faithfulness. At the moment Hosea prophesied, Judah was mostly faithful, and so God did not have as much to say to them. Isaiah's longer book of prophecy is primarily for them.

2. Immorality.

Leaving God often also means departing from his standards of ethics. Some of the idol worship itself often involved prostitution. The immoral life style of Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfortunately a prevalent characteristic of the culture of that time. **Hosea 4:10 – 19** shows how their idolatry and immorality went hand-in-hand. Of course, every individual had to take responsibility for their own choices, but the whole culture of that time was drenched with immorality, giving very few role models of individuals who chose the way of morality.

3. Injustice.

Almost all of Amos' book focuses on Israel's injustices, but Hosea deals with it a lot also. Like immorality, leaving God often also means departing from his standards of humane treatment for others. From what we see in Scripture, man's inhumanity to man (and women) is a constant source of heartache for God. Their dishonesty, mistreatment of the poor, and greed for property were all entirely opposites of the way God wanted them to treat each other as shown in his laws and decrees.

The Old Testament history books of **Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles** show both the good examples of faithfulness and the bad examples of unfaithfulness. That was true for the nation of Israel even before they divided, but it was especially true of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, after the kingdom was divided into two parts. To be sure, there were many notable exceptions in the Northern Kingdom, mostly prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, and Amos, but most of it, especially in their leadership, was bad.

This backdrop of over two centuries of consistent and persistent unfaithfulness makes God's heartache as he revealed to Hosea understandable. So, as will be frequently stated in this journal, that makes us appreciate even more the persistent love of God.

Baal Peor	9:10	Where the Israelites committed shameful immorality under the influence of Balaam (Num. 25).
Benjamin	5:8	Jacob's youngest son. The tribe of Benjamin was one of the two tribes making up the Southern Kingdom.
Beth Arbel	10:14	One of the battlegrounds where Shalman (or Shalmaneser) of Assyria defeated Israel. That conquest is described in 2 Kings 17 & 18, although Beth Arbel is not mentioned there.
Beth Aven	4:15; 5:8; 10:5	Literally, the "house of vanity" or "wickedness." The disgraced name of Bethel (see below). The "house of God" became the "house of wickedness."
Bethel	10:15; 12:4	Literally, the "house of God." About 12 miles N of Jerusalem. A rich, spiritual history for Abraham, Jacob, and Samuel, but turned into the center of idolatry by Jeroboam I.
Egypt	11 x in Hosea	Historically one of the off-and-on leading powers of the ancient world. Although they were often enemies of God's people, God warned them about their frequent temptations and actions of looking to Egypt for help, instead of looking to him.
Ephraim	30 x in Hosea	Joseph's son and Jacob's grandson. Became one of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the leading tribe of the Northern Kingdom. Ephraim's name is often used synonymously with the Northern Kingdom.
Gibeah	5:8; 9:9; 10:9	Town NW of Jerusalem, remembered for a despicable incident of sin in Judges 19 and for many of King Saul's sins in 1 Sam. 10 – 14.
Gilead	6:8; 12:11	A region east of the Jordan noted in the beginning for its balm (the "balm of Gilead"), but known in Hosea's day for its wickedness.
Gilgal	4:15; 9:15; 12:11	A name used frequently in Israel's past but referred to by Hosea as a place of idolatry. The location is not certain but probably near the Jordan River.

(continued on the next page)

Appendix 2

Glossary of Names and Places in Hosea's Prophecy

There are over 30 names and places mentioned in Hosea's prophecy. These would have been familiar to the people of his day, but many of them are not familiar to us. While you can read this prophecy and get the main message from God without knowing the meaning of these names and places, you will usually get a much better picture of what is going on when you know their meaning. As you read them in this prophecy refer to the following brief descriptions. If you find the interest to get more information, look them up in references such as the ones listed on page 29. See also the map on page 1.

Name or Place	Uses in Hosea	Background
Admah	11:8	Admah and Zebuiim were 2 cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah, according to Deut. 29:23, although Gen. 19:24 does not mention them. They were also part of the cities that were at war at the time of Abraham and Lot (Gen. 14).
Ahaz	1:1	A wicked king of Judah around 732 BC who brought disaster on himself and on his people (2 Chron. 28).
Aram	12:12	A name signifying different locations throughout Biblical history. At the time that Jacob went to find his wife (Gen. 28), it referred to Northwest Mesopotamia. In later times it was synonymous with Syria, whose capital was Damascus.
Assyria	8 x in Hosea	A world power during Hosea's time, whose capital was Nineveh of Jonah fame. They conquered the Northern Kingdom around 721 BC and were later conquered by the Babylonians.
Baal	2:8, 17; 11:2	A god (or sometimes a combination of gods, "Baals") commonly worshipped in Canaan. The Northern Kingdom devoted itself to worshipping Baal, and the Southern Kingdom also often joined it. Elijah had his famous and victorious contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18), but its worship continued, often accompanied with immorality and even some human (child) sacrifice.

Week 1 Hosea 1 – 2

Hosea's Heartache for His Family

It is not clear to us, from what is stated in verse 2, if God wanted Hosea to marry Gomer or if he was telling him what would happen if he did marry her. It is clear, though, that God helped Hosea both deal with the heartache of his marriage and get a greater appreciation of the persistence of God's love. Hosea's tragic adulterous marriage gave him a unique insight into the heartache of God caused by spiritual adultery.

Hosea's and Gomer's Children

Two sons and one daughter are mentioned in chapter 1, along with their unusual names.

- **Jezreel.** God told Hosea to name his first son after a town of the same name (1:4 – 5). God said he was going to punish Israel for what happened in the town of Jezreel. Over 100 years before a man named Jehu destroyed wicked King Ahab's descendants at Jezreel. You can read about that in **2 Kings 9 – 10**. That action itself was needed, but Jehu's kingship and that of his descendants after him, right up to Jeroboam II in Hosea's time, were marked with idolatry and injustices. This punishment, God said, would put an end to Jehu's dynasty and to Israel. (Refer to the *Glossary of Names and Places* on page 25 as names come up in your study of this prophecy. That will add some time to your studying. It's not easy or fast, but it is helpful to better understand this message from God.)
- **Lo-Ruhamah.** Gomer's daughter was not Hosea's child, and God told him to temporarily give her this unfortunate name, which means "not loved" or "no mercy" (1:6 – 7). God said that this indicated the broken relationship between him and the Northern Kingdom, Israel, although there still was a relationship between him and the Southern Kingdom, Judah.
- **Lo-Ammi.** Gomer's third child, a son, was also not Hosea's and was temporarily given the tragic name which blatantly meant "not my people" (1:8 – 9).

Chapter 1 ends and chapter 2 begins with a hint of God's reversal of these last two names, a thought that is finalized at the end of chapter 2. But the stark reality remained that Israel was no longer God's loved people. Certainly it was a tragic situation in Hosea's family, but it was also a clear indication of the tragedy that God had been experiencing in his family for centuries.

(continued on the next page)

The Steadfast Love of the Lord Tested

Chapter 2 poetically and graphically describes the tragic history of God and his people. It was a marriage covenant that God took seriously, but his people often did not.¹ The chapter ends with God's plan of restoration of that covenant. In many ways, the first two chapters of **Hosea** provide the overture for the story of the whole prophecy. The rest of the book will repeat the story with more detail, but you have the big, overview picture here:

- God loves the people he brought into existence.
- They were persistently unfaithful to him.
- His plan to punish them is connected to his desire to bring them back.

As stated previously, the last words of chapter 2 (verse 23) show God's desire and his plan for both Hosea's family and his own family to reverse the unloved-not-my-people situation for those who repent.

*I will show my love to the one I called "Not my loved one."
I will say to those called "Not my people," "You are my people";
and they will say "You are my God."*

Just as Hosea's family was symbolic of God's heartache caused by Israel's unfaithfulness, his family also became a symbol of God's restoration.² Gomer's children, and God's people, have new names: *Loved* and *My People*. It's encouraging to already see the exhortation back in 2:1 to refer to others with the new names:

Say of your brothers, "My people," and of your sisters, "My loved one."

That could have applied to the older brother Jezreel (i.e. do not be like the older brother in Jesus' parable of the lost son) as well as to the faithful in Israel.

You may be familiar with **1 Peter 2:9 – 10** and how that compares to the revelation God gave Hosea. Look at what God revealed to Peter and see what he says to us:

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who
called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God;
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

So, the ancient story of Hosea has a great insight into and application for our relationship with God today and with each other. Once we were not shown mercy or considered to be the people of God. Now we have that mercy and are his chosen people. He wants us to see ourselves that way and see our brothers and sisters that way – we are God's loved, mercy-filled people.

Jehu	841 – 814	
Jehoahaz	814 – 798	
Jehoash (Joash)	798 – 782	
Jeroboam II	782 – 753	Jonah/ Amos/Hosea
Zechariah	753 – 752	
Shallum	752	
Menahem	752 – 742	
Pekahiah	742 – 740	
Pekah	740 – 732	
Hoshea	732 – 721	

Athaliah (Queen)	841 – 835	
Joash	835 – 796	
Amaziah	796 – 767	
Azariah (Uzziah)**	767 – 740	Hosea
Jotham	740 – 732	Isaiah
		Isaiah
Ahaz	732 – 716	Isaiah
Hezekiah	716 – 687	Isaiah/Micah
Manasseh	687 – 642	Nahum
Amon	642 – 640	Zephaniah
		Habakkuk
Josiah	640 – 608	
Jehoahaz	608	
Jehoiakim	608 – 597	Daniel
Jehoiachin	597	Jeremiah
Zedekiah	597 – 586	Ezekiel

* All dates are approximate. Different resources estimate them differently.

** Uzziah reigned for a total of 52 years (2 Kings 15:2) but some of it was at the same time as his father.

Appendix 1

Historical Background of the Prophets

The United Kingdom

King	Approximate Dates* (BC)	Prophet
Saul	1050 – 1010	Samuel
David	1010 – 970	Nathan
Solomon	970 – 931	

The Divided Kingdom

Judah (The Southern Kingdom)

King	Approximate Dates* (BC)	Prophet
Rehoboam	931 – 913	
Abijah	913 – 911	
Asa	911 – 870	
Jehoshaphat	870 – 848	
Jehoram	848 – 841	
Ahaziah	841	

Israel (The Northern Kingdom)

King	Approximate Dates* (BC)	Prophet
Jeroboam I	931 – 910	
Nadab	910 – 909	
Baasha	909 – 886	
Elah	886 – 885	
Zimri	885	
Omri	885 – 874	
Ahab	874 – 853	Elijah/Micaiah
Ahaziah	853 – 852	
Joram	852 – 841	Elisha

Hosea's children would have had an amazing testimony about all of that. And so do we, all of which makes us appreciate the persistent love of God even more.

Thought Questions

1. How does it feel to see the heartache of Hosea and his family?
2. How does it feel to see the heartache of God? (There will be more about this in the next readings.)
3. Does this help you to grasp more about the persistent love of God?

Notes

Week 2

Hosea 3 – 5
Hosea 3 – 5

God's Heartache for His People

Hosea was told to love his wife the way the LORD loves Israel (3:1). That, of course, involved costly grace. Hosea had to buy Gomer out of the enslaved situation she was in, illustrating what God had also done for Israel in their past and was going to do for them (and all of us) through his Son in their future. You can see God's hope for his people to return to him (3:5), a hope that was not fulfilled until Christ came, and many Israelites came to him. (We often focus on the obvious fact that Jesus was rejected by most of his people, but a huge number of them, both Jews and Samaritans, did welcome him.)³

"My People Are Destroyed from Lack of Knowledge" (4:6)

Chapters 4 and 5 (and, in fact, the rest of this book) go into detail about the familiar story of Israel's departure from God. Viewing that from the allegory of unfaithfulness in a marriage, you can see how horrible that made God feel.

Examples of the idolatry, immorality, and injustices⁴ that were frequent occurrences in their lives (as noted in the preliminary study on page 4 of this journal) are described in these two chapters (4:1 – 4, for instance), as well as the remaining chapters of the book.

God describes their tragic and unreasonable mistake in 4:7, where he says that *"they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful."* No one would knowingly exchange glory for disgrace, but that is what they did. We would probably have to admit that we have done that also.

God also describes them as having *"the spirit of prostitution"* (4:12 and 5:4). That shows that their situation was a sickness of the soul, not just an occasional bad behavior of an otherwise faithful people. (It's also interesting that God's Word frequently uses the language of "prostitution" to describe spiritual unfaithfulness in the form of idolatry. See **Exodus 34:15 – 16** and **Leviticus 17:7; 20:5 – 6**, for instances.)

You can see God's explanation that this destruction (4:6) and their ruin (4:14) were brought about by a lack of knowledge. It wasn't a matter of not being aware of some things; they had rejected this knowledge (4:6). You can imagine God's heartache when he told them that because of their rejection of knowledge, he had to reject them (4:6).

As you may know, *"knowledge of God"* in the Bible is more than just awareness of facts about him. It also involves the intimate relationship with him. You *know Him*, not just you *know about him*. It may not be a coincidence that the

have the right attitude about those activities. Let's not be satisfied with just doing things for God and forget about being like God in the way he loves to give mercy.

God bless you for pouring your heart into this somewhat difficult study. May you continue in your life-long quest to know the Bible better and know your God better.

John Sullivan

Hosea Conclusion

The Persistence of God's Love

God's love, though tried by our unfaithfulness, is steadfast and sure, redeeming us time and time again.

Hopefully, you felt the impact of the fact that most of what you just read in **Hosea** was God himself speaking. Authors of the Bible spoke what God inspired them to say, but some of them, like Hosea, were dictating word-for-word what God wanted people to hear.

And what God seemed to want the people of Hosea's day to hear then, and for readers like us to hear today, was that while he has been and will be patient with us, there can come a time when he decides to let us be alone until we come to our senses. In spite of him withholding his mercy from us during that time, his love for us will persist, because he desires for us to let those times of punishment bring us back to him.

Did you get a better grasp of how hard it is for God to be persistent in his love?

Hopefully that made it even more clear about the importance of the prayer in **Ephesians 3:17b – 19**.

*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power, together with all the saints,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge –
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

You can see what Paul means when he says that God's love actually surpasses knowledge. I don't know about you, but there's some parts of that love that I still don't understand. But what God revealed through Hosea helps me grasp more of it. As stated several times in this journal: seeing how difficult it is helps us appreciate even more the persistent love of God.

Let us also not forget two of the powerful themes brought out in this prophecy:

- **A lack of knowledge can lead to our destruction.** No, that is not saying that you have to pass a difficult test about the facts of the Bible. But it does remind us that we want to keep growing in our knowledge of the Bible, so that will help us in our ultimate goal to know God better.
- **God desires mercy over sacrifice.** As we noted in the study, that does not mean that obeying God's instructions about activities such as worship is not important at all, but it does mean that God wants us to

word "know" is also often frequently used in Scripture to describe the intimate relationship between husband and wife.

God's concern about Israel's lack of knowing him is the same insightful compassion Jesus had for the people around him.

- You see that when he described the people in need as "*harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (**Matthew 9:36**). Not knowing the true shepherd was destroying their lives.
- You even see that when he prayed for the forgiveness of the ones killing him, because "*they do not know what they are doing*" (**Luke 23:34**). Their lack of knowledge of who Jesus really was caused them to make the biggest mistake of their lives.
- Add to that the statement from Jesus telling the misguided religious leaders that their error was caused by the fact that they did "*not know the Scriptures or the power of God*" (**Mark 12:24**). They actually did know a lot of facts about the Bible, but their lack of knowledge about the heart of the Bible and the true nature of God led them into error. They knew about God, but they did not know God.

That lack of knowledge describes Hosea's time, Jesus' time, and our time. It never justifies the behavior, but it explains it, and it implies that the place to start is with the goal of helping people, starting with ourselves, to know God better – not just knowledge about facts, because the Israelites knew those, but a true knowledge of who God is and what he is like.

One huge step in getting to know God better, then and now, is the humility to admit where we are powerless and admitting what we don't know.

"Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God" (5:4).

"Israel's arrogance testifies against them" (5:5 and repeated in 7:10).⁵

Israel was powerless and trapped by their persistent actions, but their pride prevented them from going back to their Maker. Sound familiar?

God's Retreat (5:15)

Sometimes, when people get to the point that the Israelites were in, God's solution is to let them alone until they come to their senses. You can see that in what he told Hosea (5:15):

*I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt.
And they will seek my face;
in their misery they will earnestly seek me.*

Wow! Let that sink in. It reminds us of what is taught in other Scriptures. Although God has the power to force us to follow him, he gives us the freedom to choose.

(continued on the next page)

You see that clearly in Jesus' story of the father and his rebellious son (**Luke 15:11 – 32**). The father in that parable deeply wanted the son to return, but he stayed home waiting for him to come to his senses. The son, in his misery, finally did just that. It is also described, in a little more graphic language, as "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" (**Romans 1:24**). "Giving them over" is not "giving up." It is a part of the process that is sometimes necessary for us to admit that we are helpless and that we want to earnestly seek him.

The "misery" that the Israelites experienced was partly a direct punishment from God, but a lot of it was just the consequences of their own idolatry, immorality, and injustices. Fortunately, many people down through the ages have recognized the "value" of that misery: it led them to seek God.

Psalms 119:71 has a short, but powerful statement about that:

*It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I might learn your decrees.*

Make sure you consider whether or not you truly agree with what is said there. It's not that God causes that misery. Sometimes it is just the consequences of our bad decisions and choices. But the point is that the "misery" can lead us to God, if we let it.

Seeing all of this once again makes us appreciate the persistent love of God.

Thought Questions

1. What role does a "lack of knowledge" play in your times of unfaithfulness to God?
2. What role did "misery" play in your decision to earnestly seek God?
3. How does seeing the long history of unfaithfulness, both in God's people as a whole and in our own personal lives, help you appreciate the persistent love of God?

Notes

Thought Questions

1. How can we avoid Israel's wrong conclusions about God's blessings: being satisfied and pridefully forgetting God?
2. What do you learn about God from the history of the Samaritans?
3. After studying God's revelation to Hosea, what is your conclusion about the persistent love of God? Are you grasping it?

Notes

You may recognize God's words about death and the grave (13:14) by remembering Paul's similar words in **1 Corinthians 15:55**. Among other things, that shows you the impact that the Old Testament Scriptures had on the New Testament writings. What it showed to the people of Hosea's day, the people of Paul's day, and to us is that death is obviously powerful, but God is more powerful. It is not saying that death has no sting at all; rather, it is saying that God takes us through that sting. He comforts us when death takes away our loved ones, and seeing him face-to-face at our own time of death will take away absolutely all of the pain that might have been involved in our own life and death.

The Conclusion of the Matter (Chapter 14)

Typical of many of the prophets, the revelations to Hosea include a description of the people's sin that took them away from God, a call to repentance, and a vision of what happens when they return to God (God would "heal their waywardness" (14:4)). As we have seen five other times in this book, the Northern Kingdom is identified in 13:16 with their capital city Samaria. Their genuine words of repentance in 14:2 – 3 that God wanted them to use, as opposed to their possibly insincere ones back in 6:1 – 3, state that they will never again bow to idols. Sadly, those words were not likely used by very many people of Hosea's generation, but fast forward 7 centuries to the Samaritans of Jesus' day, who were the descendants of the Northern Kingdom: while Jesus had to correct them about many of their false spiritual ideas, idolatry was not one of them. That was true for both the Samaritans and the Jewish people as a whole at the time of Christ. Also, God's prophecy to Hosea about wanting to restore people of the Northern Kingdom makes Jesus' ministry to the Samaritans and their conversions in **Acts 8** seem even more exciting. God had always wanted that to happen! They repented and God forgave. Once again you see the power of God's persistent love, and once again that makes us appreciate it even more.

Hosea's prophecy closes with these words (14:9):

*Who is wise? Let them realize these things.
Who is discerning? Let them understand.
The ways of the LORD are right;
the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*

Amen; enough said!

Week 3

Hosea 6 – 8
Hosea 6 – 8

God's Desire for His People

God's desire for his people has always been to have a loving relationship between himself and them and also for his people to have a loving relationship with each other. (Does that sound like the greatest commandments?) We see a lot about that desire in this verse:

"I Desire Mercy and Not Sacrifice" (6: 6)

Jesus quoted that verse to the people of his day (**Matthew 9:13**) when they were criticizing him for reaching out to sinners. He actually gave them a homework assignment about this verse. Jesus told them to:

*Go and learn what this means:
"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."*

Just like the people of Hosea's time, the people around Jesus were missing a very important point. Israel was making the gestures of returning to God (**Hosea 6:1 – 3** and **8:2**), but God's reaction seems to indicate that he could tell that it was insincere. He said that their love was about as lasting as the morning mist (6:4) and while they said those words they were rejecting what is good (8:3). He didn't want them to go through the motions of religious activity and use religious words while treating one another with injustice. Jesus' hearers probably knew exactly what Scripture he was referencing. Maybe he wanted them to read it again, meditate on it, and think about what it really meant, because he strongly desired for them to experience and show mercy.

When God told Israel "I desire mercy," that could have two implications:

- God desires to give mercy; and
- God desires for us to show mercy to others.

Scriptures make something clear that we sometimes find hard to accept: God loves to give mercy. One of the tricks of Satan seems to be to make us think that God doesn't want to be merciful. That's an example of a situation when we want to make sure that we know and continually listen to the Scriptures, not to Satan's deceptions. God's Word also makes it clear that he loves to see us pass that mercy on to others.

It's possible, and hopeful, that many Israelites learned from God's revelation to them through Hosea. It is also likely that many of Jesus' followers learned a lot from his assignment to them, and it changed their perspective. But we know that in both settings many, if not most, did not get it. Jesus had to tell the Pharisees sometime after giving them their assignment that (**Matthew 12:7**):

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*If you had known what these words mean,
"I desire mercy, not sacrifice,"
you would not have condemned the innocent.*

If they had learned from their assignment, they would be showing mercy instead of condemnation. The more we see how patient God has had to be with us as a people in our resistance of receiving and showing mercy, the more we appreciate the persistence of his love and the more we are willing to pass it on to others.

Let's make sure we learn from God's desire. Just like people of Hosea's day and like the people around Jesus, we can easily find ourselves valuing outward religious activity and words while ignoring the "weightier matters" of justice, mercy, and faithfulness (**Matthew 23:23**). See also **James 2:12 – 13**.

Sowing to the Wind; Reaping the Whirlwind (8:7)

There was obviously much to be gained by obeying God's commands about things like sacrifice. God's desire for mercy rather than sacrifice was not a criticism of true sacrifice. It was an indictment of outward actions without the heart. Those kinds of actions are about as helpful as "sowing to the wind." Imagine taking a handful of seed that you are trying to plant in a particular area and just throwing it (sowing) into a 40 mph gust of wind. What good is that? God said that the result (the reaping) was like a whirlwind. You're worse off than when you started. Sounds like **I Corinthians 13** where Paul said that activities, even religious ones, are useless without love. They may have some benefit to the recipients, but not to the one doing them.

And why is that? Is it because God himself rejects it? Maybe. Is it because the sinfulness of the outwardly sacrificial heart is bringing down their own destruction? Maybe it's both. God described the situation in 8:11 with a clever but sad play on words:

*"Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings,
these have become altars for sinning."*

Some religious activities can end up doing more harm than good if the right heart is not in it. Again, that is not a call to stop doing Biblical religious activities, but it is a challenge to do them with the right heart.

One sad thing also was that Israel should have known God and his ways of mercy better. They are the ones who should have known what God desired and what he can do.⁶ And so should we.

While the process of being faithful to God has many moving parts, some of it is summarized by thoughts as simple as what is found in verse 14 of chapter 8:

"Israel has forgotten his Maker."

Far too many conversations, plans, concerns, worries, fears, and mental agonies (even about good things) must have occurred then (as they do now)

Twice in these last three chapters Israel is told to simply "return to God" (12:6 and 14:1). While there would be a lot of details involved in reversing the idolatry, immorality, and injustice that had been so prominent for centuries, the simple point would be to return to God. Even though it would be difficult to replace all of the sins that were their downfall (14:1) with love, justice, and waiting for God (12:6), God would make it possible. Unfortunately, the Northern Kingdom of Israel did not take that instruction at that time, but we can.

Chapter 12 refers to some events in their ancestor Jacob's life to remind them of their own lives (12:2 – 4). For instance:

- Jacob's name meant "heel grabber" from the incident in his mother's womb with his twin brother Esau (**Genesis 25:26**).
- When he wrestled with an angel his name was changed to *Israel*, which means "wrestling with God" or "the one with whom God wrestles" (**Genesis 32:24 – 28**).

In chapters 12 and 13, and as you have seen many other times throughout Hosea's prophecy, the Northern Kingdom is referred to as *Ephraim*. (See the *Glossary of Names and Places* on page 25 for more information.) That was the largest of the 10 tribes that made up the Northern Kingdom, and they were known for striking fear in people (13:1). But their departure from God had brought them to an all-time low. Again, as mentioned before in this journal, it was not just an occasional mistake of an otherwise faithful people that "provoked him to anger" (12:14). God is not that easily provoked to anger. Scripture says over and over again that he is slow to anger (**Psalms 145:8**, for just one instance). But "slow to anger" does not mean "never gets angry." Ephraim was about to find that out.

The unintended consequences of, or wrong conclusions about, God's blessings are found in 13:4 – 6. You see a pattern there that we definitely want to avoid:

- They were in need.
- God took care of them and satisfied that need.
- When they were satisfied, they became proud and forgot God.⁹

That, of course, does not have to be the result of being blessed by God. It should result in gratitude, praise, and generosity. People who are blessed by God should become a blessing to others. But we need to recognize that we can respond the way Israel did if we're not careful.

(continued on the next page)

Notes

without even a hint of remembering God and his power and love. That's something that we can say that we want to focus on everyday. We want to consistently remember God and practice his presence in everything we do. ⁷

As already stated in this journal, and will be repeated again, the more we understand how difficult we have made it to be loved, the more we appreciate the persistent love of God.

Thought Questions

1. What does God's desire for mercy (6:6) mean for you personally and practically?
2. How has heartless religious activity ever been what is said in 8:7 for you personally?
3. What can you do to make sure you do not forget your Maker?

Notes

It's Time to Seek the LORD

Recall that Hosea prophesied for some 20 or 30 years around 750 BC concerning the idolatrous, immoral, and unjust Northern Kingdom (known then as "Israel"). The Bible book that bears his name was probably not a one-time writing, but rather a collection of revelations and teachings over those years. So some of our chapters seem more repetitive than we would expect in a single writing. Certainly these last few chapters repeat the bad news that we have already seen. At the same time, there are many new ideas.

NOTE (REMINDER): Use the glossary on page 25 to get a better understanding of the names and places mentioned in Hosea's writings.

No Longer Loved (9:15 – 17)

This is definitely one of the most difficult sections in this book, if not the whole Bible. We are so conditioned by our view of God's unconditional love from great and inspirational passages like **Romans 8:35 – 39** that we can't understand how God could say that he no longer loved Israel. The point of this revelation from God seems to be that Israel's centuries of prolonged ungodliness had brought them to this time of punishment from God. It's not that God doesn't actually care for them anymore (chapter 11 clearly shows that he did), but that he was withholding the blessings of his love to bring them to a point of repentance. He was rejecting them (9:17), although it was their centuries of rejecting him that had actually broken the covenant relationship. Let's not ever get to the point of taking God's unconditional love for granted to the extent that we think we can disobey him flagrantly and without repentance and not face the consequences. As **Romans 11:22 – 24** points out, we should consider both "*the kindness and the sternness of God.*" Don't let Satan rob you of the security of God's unconditional love because of the guilt you might have about some times of weakness, but also don't let him fool you into thinking that there is no such thing as the wrath of God.⁸

Plow, Plant, Reap (10:12 – 13)

The planting and harvesting analogy is seen often in Scripture. Verse 12 refers to one aspect of that process, an analogy that is also used in **Jeremiah 4:3**:

*Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD.*

It's never too late if it's "*time to seek the LORD.*" Subsequent history shows, as verse 13 points out, that many, if not most, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel

did not take this exhortation to heart, especially their kings and priests. But it seems likely (or at least hopeful) that some of the individual people would have. Regardless of what they did, we can certainly take it to heart today.

- There are things that we know we need to keep doing in our walk with God (keep "*sowing and reaping*").
- And there are things that we know we need to stop doing and start afresh with the right things ("*break up the unplowed ground*").

To do that, we need to make sure we avoid their mistake of relying only on their own strength (10:13). But with God's strength all of this is possible.

God's Struggle with Israel's Situation (11:8 – 11)

God is not a human (11:9). He is not fickle and constantly changing his mind, the way we do. But that doesn't mean that it is always easy to be God. Nor does it mean that he never considers the many sides of a difficult situation before he decides what to do. Of course, it's easy for us to sit in our chairs and criticize what he does, but we need to consider what it's like for him on a daily basis to be full of love and also full of justice. It seems like God let us in on just a little of what that difficulty is like in the conversation with himself that he shares in these verses. Take some time to really appreciate the rare insight into God's thinking that is found in these 4 verses. It's not often that we think about what it's like for him to be God.

In these verses, God reveals the difficult questions that he is considering:

- How can he punish his child, the one he called out of Egypt and led with cords of human kindness and ties of love (11:1 – 4)?
- On the other hand, how can he not punish his own people who are so determined to turn from him (11:7)?

Let's not be so quick to dismiss the real difficulty of that dilemma. Yes, his compassion rules the day (11:8), and he does not treat us as our sins deserve, but let's not abuse that compassion or take it for granted. The more we see how difficult we make it to be loved, the more we appreciate the persistent love of God.

Thought Questions

1. How hard do you think it was for God to say what he said in these 3 chapters?
2. What are some applications to you personally from the analogy in 10:12?
3. How do you feel about God's vulnerability in 11:8 – 11?