

## **Easy-to-Read Version**

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## Hosea

The book of Hosea is about the love of God. It is not about how God's people should love him. And it is not about how they can please him. Instead, Hosea is about how much love God has to give. It is a sad story. But it also gives his people hope. It is about God loving his people even when his people do not return his love. This was a message God wanted Hosea to make clear to his people at a time when they were unfaithful to him. Hosea was a prophet who spoke God's message during this difficult time in the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of its sin of worshipping idols, Israel would soon be defeated by the Assyrians, who would take away its people as captives.

God used his prophets to let his people know what he wanted for them. Very often, what God asked the prophets to do was not easy. But God asked Hosea to do something so difficult, it is hard to imagine how anyone could do it. God told Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. She would be as unfaithful to Hosea as the people of Israel had been to God. This woman was a prostitute named Gomer. In this book, Gomer represents the nation of Israel. God tells Hosea to love her even when she is not faithful to him. God tells him to have children with her even though some of them will not be his. And when she leaves Hosea and returns to being a prostitute, God tells Hosea to pay whatever it costs to buy her back.

The personal pain Hosea experiences is an example of the kind of

disappointment God experienced in his relationship with Israel. In fact, Hosea's poetry in the second chapter describes God's anger with his unfaithful people. He is so angry that he decides to divorce them, like a husband divorces his wife. And following this divorce, the "wife" will get nothing. He will completely abandon his people and take away all his blessings! But following this strong expression of God's anger is a surprising statement of his love. Just as Hosea is to try to win back his unfaithful wife, God decides to win back the heart of his unfaithful people.

The book of Hosea talks about sin in a very personal way. When we live in ways that are against what God wants for us, we are not just breaking God's laws. We are breaking the heart of someone who loves us like a faithful husband loves his wife. This God is faithful to keep his promises. He will not abandon his people, no matter how much they have hurt him. Just as Hosea rescues Gomer, God wants to rescue the whole world. And he has always had a plan to do this through his Son, Jesus. And this plan, like the story of Hosea, is a beautiful picture of true love.

In the book of Hosea, God's prophet...  
Marries an unfaithful woman (1:1 – 3:5)

Delivers God's message to his unfaithful people (4:1 – 9:9)

Writes poems about Israel's history of being unfaithful (9:10 – 13:16)

Tells the people to return to God (14:1-9)

**1** This book is the LORD's message that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the time that Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and

Hezekiah were kings of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

### Hosea Is to Be an Example of God's Love

<sup>2</sup>This was the LORD's first command to Hosea: "Go and marry a woman who will be as unfaithful\* to you as Israel has been to me. She will be a prostitute, and you will have children just like her. This will show how unfaithful my people have been in leaving me."

<sup>3</sup>So Hosea married Gomer daughter of Diblaim. She became pregnant and gave Hosea a son. <sup>4</sup>The LORD said to Hosea, "Name him Jezreel,<sup>†</sup> because I will soon punish the descendants of King Jehu for the people he killed in Jezreel Valley.<sup>‡</sup> And I will put an end to their rule in Israel. <sup>5</sup>I will break Israel's military power in Jezreel Valley."

<sup>6</sup>Then Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. The LORD said to Hosea, "Name her Lo-Ruhamah<sup>¶</sup> because I will no longer show pity to the nation of Israel. I will not forgive them.<sup>§</sup> <sup>7</sup>But I will show pity to the nation of Judah. I will save them, but not with bows or swords or war horses and chariots. I

will save them by my own power, the power of the LORD their God."

<sup>8</sup>After Gomer had finished nursing Lo-Ruhamah, she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. <sup>9</sup>Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-Ammi\*\* because you, Israel, are not my people, and I am not your God.<sup>††</sup>

### A Better Time for Israel

<sup>10</sup>"But in the future the number of the people of Israel will be as many as the grains of sand on the seashore, which no one can measure or count. In the same place where God told them, 'You are not my people,' he will call them 'children of the Living God'.

<sup>11</sup>"Then the people of Judah and the people of Israel will be united again. They will choose one ruler for themselves, and God will cause them to grow and do well in their land. Yes, that day of 'Jezreel'<sup>‡‡</sup> will be a great day!

**2** "Then you will call your brothers, 'My People', and your sisters, 'Pitied.'<sup>¶¶</sup>

### The Lord Accuses Israel

<sup>2</sup>"Tell your mother<sup>§§</sup> she has done wrong!

\***1:2 unfaithful** The theme of unfaithfulness in this book seems sometimes to refer to Israel's worship of other gods and at other times to their partnerships with foreign nations not approved by God.

<sup>†</sup>**1:4 Jezreel** This name in Hebrew means "God scatters", which can be understood two ways: to ruin (as a punishment) or, as in verse 11, to plant seed (as a blessing of new life).

<sup>‡</sup>**1:4 people ... in Jezreel Valley** See 2 Kgs 9 – 10 for the story about King Jehu and the many people he killed.

<sup>¶</sup>**1:6 Lo-Ruhamah** This name in Hebrew means "She receives no pity." Also in verse 8.

<sup>§</sup>**1:6 I will not forgive them** Or "I will destroy them completely."

\*\***1:9 Lo-Ammi** This name in Hebrew means "not my people".

<sup>††</sup>**1:9 I am not your God** Or "I am not 'I AM' for you."

<sup>‡‡</sup>**1:11 Jezreel** This name in Hebrew means "God plants", which fits the meaning of the previous sentence.

<sup>¶¶</sup>**2:1** These names are similar to the names of Hosea's daughter and third son.

<sup>§§</sup>**2:2 mother** This means the nation of Israel.

She is no longer my wife,  
 and I am no longer her husband.  
 She must stop acting like a prostitute  
 and get rid of her lovers.\*  
<sup>3</sup>If she refuses to change, I will strip off  
 her clothes  
 and leave her as naked as she was the  
 day she was born.  
 I will cause her to be like a land without  
 rain,  
 as empty and dry as a desert,  
 and I will let her die of thirst.  
<sup>4</sup>I will have no pity on her children  
 because they are unfaithful like her.  
<sup>5</sup>Their mother has acted like a  
 prostitute.  
 She was a disgraceful woman.  
 She said, 'I will chase after my lovers,  
 who give me what I need.  
 They provide my food and water,  
 my wool and linen,  
 my olive oil and wine.'  
<sup>6</sup>"So I will block her path with thorn  
 bushes;  
 I will build a wall to keep her from find-  
 ing her old ways.  
<sup>7</sup>She will chase after her lovers,  
 but she will not catch them.  
 She will look for her lovers,  
 but she will not find them.  
 Then she will say, 'I will go back to my  
 husband,  
 because life was better for me then.'  
<sup>8</sup>She didn't know that I, the Lord, was  
 the one  
 who gave her that grain, wine and oil,  
 and that I gave her all the silver and gold  
 her people used in worshipping Baal.  
<sup>9</sup>"So when the grain is ready to harvest,  
 I will take it back.  
 I will take back my grapes when they are  
 ready for wine.

I will take away my wool and linen  
 that she used to cover herself.  
<sup>10</sup>I will strip her naked so her lovers can  
 see her shame,  
 and no one will be able to save her from  
 me.  
<sup>11</sup>I will end all her celebrations:  
 her annual and monthly festivals and  
 weekly days of rest.  
 I will stop all her religious holidays.  
<sup>12</sup>I will destroy her vines and fig trees,  
 which she thought her lovers gave her.  
 I will turn them into a tangle of weeds  
 that only wild animals will eat.  
<sup>13</sup>I will punish her for all the times she  
 worshipped false gods  
 by burning sacrifices to the idols of Baal.  
 She put on her rings and jewellery  
 and went out to find her lovers.  
 But she forgot about me."  
 This is what the LORD says.  
<sup>14</sup>"So my plan now is to win her back.  
 I will lead her into the desert  
 and speak tender words to her.  
<sup>15</sup>There I will give back the vineyards  
 she had.  
 I will make her 'Valley of Trouble' a  
 doorway to hope.  
 Then she will answer 'Yes' to me, as she  
 did in her youth,  
 when she came out of the land of Egypt."  
<sup>16</sup>The LORD says: "At that time you will  
 call me 'my husband'  
 and no longer call me 'my Baal'.<sup>†</sup>  
<sup>17</sup>I will take the names of those false  
 gods out of your mouth  
 so that you will not say their names  
 again.  
<sup>18</sup>That's when I will make a peace agree-  
 ment for you  
 with the wild animals, the birds of the  
 sky

\***2:2 her lovers** Or "her adulteries". Israel's worship of other gods and its partnerships with other nations were like spiritual adultery.

<sup>†</sup>**2:16 my Baal** This has a double meaning. Baal was a Canaanite god, but the name also means "lord" or "husband".

and the animals that crawl on the ground.

I will get rid of bows and swords and all weapons of war.

I will make the land safe so you can sleep peacefully.

<sup>19</sup>I promise to make you my wife forever.

I will be good to you and do what is right.

I will be kind to you and show you my love.<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>20</sup>I will take you as my wife and be faithful to you.

Then you will be one with<sup>¶</sup> the LORD.

<sup>21</sup>“When that time comes,” says the LORD,

“I will answer you.

I will speak to the skies, and they will give rain to the earth.

<sup>22</sup>The earth will produce grain, wine and oil,

which will meet the needs of my people Jezreel.<sup>§</sup>

<sup>23</sup>I will plant my people in the land and make them grow.

To Lo-Ruhamah<sup>\*\*</sup> I will show pity.

To Lo-Ammi<sup>††</sup> I will say, ‘You are my people.’

And they will say to me, ‘You are our God!’”

### Hosea Buys Gomer Back From Slavery

**3** Then the LORD said to me, “Your wife has a lover and has been unfaithful to you. But you must go and

show your love to her again, because it is an example of the LORD’s love for Israel. He continues to love them, even though they have turned to other gods and love the raisin cakes<sup>‡‡</sup> offered to them.”

<sup>2</sup>So I bought her back for 15 pieces<sup>¶¶</sup> of silver and 150 kilogrammes<sup>§§</sup> of barley. <sup>3</sup>Then I told her, “You must stay at home with me now and stop living like a prostitute. You will not have sex with anyone, not even me, for a long time.”

<sup>4</sup>In the same way, the people of Israel will have to live a long time without the things that have made them unfaithful. They will not have their own king or leader. They will be without sacrifices, sacred stones, ephods or idols. <sup>5</sup>But after that, the people of Israel will come back and want to serve the LORD their God and the king from David’s family. One day they will come to the LORD with fear and trembling and enjoy the good life he has for them.

### The Lord’s Complaint Against Israel

**4** People of Israel, listen to the LORD’s message. The LORD has a complaint to bring against you people who live in this land:

“No one in this land is dependable or loyal.

No one really knows God.

<sup>2</sup>Broken promises, lying, killing, stealing and adultery are everywhere.

You murder one person after another.

<sup>3</sup>So your land is drying up,

<sup>‡</sup>2:19 *I will ... love* Or “To make you mine I offer justice, fairness, love and kindness.”

<sup>¶</sup>2:20 *be one with* Literally, “know”.

<sup>§</sup>2:22 *Jezreel* The use of this name for Israel here gives it a positive meaning, “God plants.” (See the note at 1:4.) The same idea is continued in verse 23.

<sup>\*\*</sup>2:23 *Lo-Ruhamah* This name in Hebrew means “She receives no pity.” See 1:6.

<sup>††</sup>2:23 *Lo-Ammi* This name in Hebrew means “not my people”. See 1:8.

<sup>‡‡</sup>3:1 *raisin cakes* This food was probably used in the feasts that honoured false gods.

<sup>¶¶</sup>3:2 *15 pieces* Literally, “15 *shekels*”.

<sup>§§</sup>3:2 *150 kilogrammes* Literally, “1/2 *homer* and 1 *letek*”.

and all its people are dying.  
 Even the wild animals, the birds of the  
 sky  
 and the fish in the sea are disappearing.

<sup>4</sup>“Don’t look for someone else to accuse  
 or blame.

Priests, my complaint is against you!\*

<sup>5</sup>You will stumble and fall in the  
 daytime,  
 and at night the prophets will fall with  
 you.

I also will destroy your mother Israel.†

<sup>6</sup>My people are being destroyed  
 because they do not know me.

You priests have refused to teach about  
 me,

so I refuse to let you be my priests.

You have rejected the law of your God,  
 so I will reject your sons.

<sup>7</sup>The more you priests grew in number  
 and power,

the more you sinned against me.

So I will change your honour to shame.

<sup>8</sup>“The people’s offerings for sin provide  
 food for the priests.

So the priests are eager for the people to  
 sin!

<sup>9</sup>The priests are as bad as the people.

So I will punish them all for the way they  
 live.

I will pay them back for the evil they do.

<sup>10-11</sup> They will eat

but never be satisfied.

They will have sex with anyone who will  
 pay them,

but they will still have no children,

because they have left the LORD.

They have been unfaithful to me.

“My people drink too much wine,  
 and it ruins their ability to think clearly.

<sup>12</sup>They ask idols made of wood for  
 advice.

They think a stick of wood will tell them  
 what to do!

Like a woman who has left her husband  
 for other lovers,

they have left their own God for other  
 gods.

<sup>13</sup>They make sacrifices on the tops of the  
 mountains

and burn incense on the hills under oak,  
 poplar and elm trees.‡

The shade under those trees is nice.

So your own daughters sell themselves  
 there for sex,

and your daughters-in-law are unfaithful  
 to their husbands.

<sup>14</sup>But I will not punish your daughters  
 for being prostitutes

or your daughters-in-law for being  
 unfaithful.

Why should I punish them?

You men have sex with prostitutes!

And you join them in offering sacrifices  
 to false gods.

This is how a foolish nation destroys  
 itself.

<sup>15</sup>“Israel, you are as unfaithful as a  
 prostitute!

May Judah never be guilty of doing what  
 you have done.

My people, don’t worship at Gilgal,  
 and stay away from Beth-aven.¶

Don’t make promises there  
 using the LORD’s name!

<sup>16</sup>Israel is as stubborn as a young cow.

\* **4:4 Priests ... you** The Hebrew here is unclear. It could be translated, “For your people are like those who accuse a priest.”

† **4:5 I ... Israel** Or “So I will destroy your own mothers,” or “You have destroyed your own people.” The Hebrew here is unclear.

‡ **4:13 tops ... trees** High places and groves of trees were popular places for the worship of false gods.

¶ **4:15 Beth-aven** Beth-aven means “House of Evil”. It is a wordplay on the town’s real name, “Bethel”, meaning “House of God”. Also in 5:8.

So how can the LORD feed them like  
lambs in a meadow?

<sup>17</sup>The people of Israel<sup>§</sup> have given them-  
selves to idols,  
so leave them alone!

<sup>18</sup>When they have drunk all their wine,  
they go looking for prostitutes.  
The way they live is shameful,  
but they love it too much to change.

<sup>19</sup>They have been caught up in a  
whirlwind,  
and their worship of idols will bring  
them only shame.

### God Accuses Israel

**5** “Listen, you priests.  
Pay attention, you leaders of Israel.  
You members of the royal family, listen  
to me.

Your job is to lead with justice!  
But you led people into a trap at Mizpah  
and spread a net to catch them at Ta-  
bor.\*\*

<sup>2</sup>You have sunk deep into evil,  
and I will punish you all.

<sup>3</sup>Israel, I know you very well.  
You cannot hide what you have done.  
Like a prostitute, you have been unfaith-  
ful to me.

You have made yourselves unfit to come  
near me.

<sup>4</sup>“The evil things my people do  
keep them away from their God.  
They are filled with a desire to be un-  
faithful to him.

They do not know the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>Israel’s pride is a witness against them.  
Their sins make them stumble and fall,  
and Judah will fall with them.

<sup>6</sup>They will come with their flocks and  
herds

to offer them as sacrifices to the LORD.  
But they will not find him  
because he has left them.

<sup>7</sup>They have been unfaithful to the LORD.  
Their children are not his.

So as soon as it is time for the New Moon  
celebration,  
he will destroy them and their land.

### God Warns Israel and Judah

<sup>8</sup>“Blow the horn to warn Gibeah.

Blow the trumpet in Ramah.††  
Sound the warning at Beth-aven.

People of Benjamin, watch your back!

<sup>9</sup>When the time for punishment comes,  
Israel will be a pile of ruins.

I am warning the tribes of Israel  
that this is sure to happen.

<sup>10</sup>Judah’s leaders are acting like crooks  
who move boundary markers to steal  
land.

So I will pour out my anger on them like  
a flood.

<sup>11</sup>And Israel will be crushed flat by my  
punishment  
because they trusted in what was useless  
to them.

<sup>12</sup>I will destroy Israel like a moth eating  
away cloth.

I will ruin Judah like rot decaying wood.

<sup>13</sup>“Israel and Judah finally understood  
how sick they were  
and saw that they had been wounded.  
That’s when Israel turned to Assyria  
and sent for help from the great king  
there.

But the king cannot heal you, my people,  
or cure your wounds.

<sup>14</sup>I will come to Israel as a lion,  
to Judah as a young lion.  
I will tear them to pieces.

<sup>§</sup>4:17 *people of Israel* Literally, “Ephraim”, a name Hosea often uses in the rest of the book for the northern tribes of Israel.

\*\*5:1 *Mizpah, Tabor* People worshipped false gods on these mountains.

††5:8 *Gibeah, Ramah* Cities near Judah’s border with Israel.

I will carry them away,  
and no one will be able to save them.  
15 Then I will return to my place,  
until my people admit they are guilty  
and come looking for me.  
Yes, in their time of trouble  
they will try hard to find me.”

### God’s People Expect His Blessing

**6** “Come, let’s go back to the LORD.  
He tore us to pieces, but he will heal  
us.  
He wounded us, but he will bandage our  
wounds.  
2 In a very short time<sup>‡‡</sup> he will heal us.  
Soon he will give us new life.<sup>¶¶</sup>  
Then we can live with him.  
3 Let’s all come to know the LORD.  
Let’s do our best to know him.  
He will come to us!  
It is as sure as the rising of the sun.  
He will come to us like the rain,  
like the spring rains that water the land.”

### God Replies to His People

4 “Israel,<sup>§§</sup> what should I do with you?  
And Judah, what should I do with you?  
Your love for me vanishes like the morn-  
ing mist,  
like the dew that disappears at dawn.  
5 So I have sent my prophets to cut you  
down,  
to speak words from me that will mean  
death for you.  
And everyone will see that my judge-  
ment is fair.

This is as clear as the morning sun.\*

6 I want you to show love  
more than I want your sacrifices.  
I want you to know me  
more than I want burnt offerings.  
7 “As at Adam,<sup>†</sup> my people broke my  
agreement.

There they were unfaithful to me.  
8 Gilead is a city full of people who do  
evil,

known for trickery and murder.  
9 The priests are like gangs of robbers  
who hide and wait to attack someone.  
They murder people who are on their  
way to Shechem.

They do the most horrible things.  
10 I have seen a disgusting thing happen  
in the nation<sup>‡</sup> of Israel.

Like a prostitute, my people<sup>¶</sup> have been  
unfaithful to me.  
They have made themselves unfit to  
come near me.

11 “And also for you, Judah, a time of  
harvest is coming.  
I have often wanted to bring back the  
good times for my people.

**7** “So many times I have wanted to  
heal Israel!

But all I can see is the evil there.  
I see Samaria filled with crime.  
They cheat each other.

Thieves break into houses,  
and bandits roam the streets.  
2 They don’t think about the fact  
that I will remember their crimes.  
They are covered in their sins,

<sup>‡‡</sup>6:2 *In ... time* Literally, “After two days”.

<sup>¶¶</sup>6:2 *Soon ... life* Literally, “On the third day, he will raise us up.”

<sup>§§</sup>6:4 *Israel* Literally, “Ephraim”. See Ephraim in the Word List.

<sup>\*</sup>6:5 *And everyone ... sun* This follows the ancient Greek, Syriac and Aramaic versions. The traditional Hebrew text may be understood to mean “Surely you don’t believe that anyone would think you are innocent!” or more literally, “And is your innocence a shining light?”

<sup>†</sup>6:7 *As at Adam* Or “Like Adam”.

<sup>‡</sup>6:10 *nation* Literally, “house”. This might mean the royal family or leaders.

<sup>¶</sup>6:10 *my people* Literally, “Ephraim”. See Ephraim in the Word List.

and I see them all.

<sup>3</sup> “Their evil makes the king happy.

Their lies make his officials laugh.

<sup>4</sup> They are all unfaithful traitors,  
just waiting to cause trouble.

They are like an oven that quietly heats  
up

while the baker prepares the dough.

<sup>5</sup> During a royal holiday,  
the king’s officials get drunk with wine.  
Then the leader of some traitors gives  
them the signal

that it is time to attack the king.<sup>§</sup>

<sup>6</sup> As they make their secret plans,  
they burn with anger  
like fire in an oven.

All night their anger heats up,  
and by morning it is a blazing fire.

<sup>7</sup> And while they are as hot as an oven,  
they destroy their rulers.

All their kings are gone.

And they have done all this without me.

### Israel and the Other Nations

<sup>8</sup> “Israel has mixed itself with other  
nations

and is ruined, like a pancake left to burn  
on one side.

<sup>9</sup> Foreigners have taken Israel’s strength,  
but he does not know it.

He is covered with grey hair,\*\*

but he does not know it.

<sup>10</sup> My people’s pride tells me they will  
fall.

They have had many troubles,

but they will not return to the LORD  
their God.

They don’t look to me for help.

<sup>11</sup> “They are like a silly dove that has no  
sense.

First they called to Egypt for help;  
then they asked Assyria to protect them.

<sup>12</sup> But as they fly from one place to  
another,

I will catch them.

I will throw my net over them  
and bring them down the way a hunter  
traps birds.

When I hear of their agreements with  
those nations,

I will punish them.

<sup>13</sup> “It will be bad for those who left me.

They will be destroyed for refusing to  
obey me.

I wanted to save them,

but all I hear from them is lies!

<sup>14</sup> They never pray to me from their  
hearts,

but they cry out on their beds.<sup>††</sup>

They cut themselves<sup>‡‡</sup> to offer their  
blood for grain and wine,

but they turn away from me.

<sup>15</sup> I trained them and made them strong,  
but they made evil plans against me.

<sup>16</sup> They are always changing directions,  
but never towards me.

They are as useless as a bow with a loose  
string.

Their officials will be killed with swords  
because they have insulted me.

So when they are in Egypt,

<sup>§</sup>7:5 *Then ... king* The Hebrew here is difficult. It can be translated literally, “He stretched out his hand with mockers,” which doesn’t fit well with the rest of the passage. It could also mean “He gave a signal to the traitors,” which implies an action against the king. This reading fits well with the verses that follow.

\*\*7:9 *grey hair* This may mean old age, or it could describe something like mould that makes bread or other food useless.

††7:14 *but ... beds* Or “but they boast about their time with temple prostitutes”. This probably refers to acts of worship in the temples of the false god Baal.

‡‡7:14 *cut themselves* This refers to something done by priests in the temples of Baal. They offered their blood so that Baal would bless the crops.

the people will laugh at them.

### Idol Worship Leads to Destruction

**8** “Take your trumpet and sound the warning!

Like an eagle the enemy circles over the LORD’s people.

They have broken my agreement and refused to obey my law.

<sup>2</sup>They cry out to me,  
‘Our God, we, the people of Israel, know you!’

<sup>3</sup>But Israel has rejected all that is good, so their enemies will chase after them.

<sup>4</sup>They chose their kings without asking my advice.

They chose leaders without my help.

They used their silver and gold to make idols

that would lead to their own ruin.

<sup>5</sup>Samaria, I reject this calf-shaped idol<sup>¶¶</sup> that you have made.

It makes me very angry with you!

When will you ever be free from guilt?

<sup>6</sup>This idol is from Israel.

It was made by hand.

It is not God.

So this calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces.

<sup>7</sup>“Israel is like a foolish farmer who plants nothing but the wind.

Like the farmer, who will harvest a whirlwind,

Israel can expect only troubles.

They are like stalks of wheat without grain,

which will never produce any flour.

And even if they did produce food, foreigners would eat it.

<sup>8</sup>Israel’s people are lost among the other nations.

They are as useless as a broken dish.

<sup>9</sup>Like a wild donkey that wanders away on its own,

Israel has gone off to Assyria.

They are looking for someone to care for them,

like a man who pays a prostitute.

<sup>10</sup>Even if they have paid for friends among the nations,

I will bring them to an end.

They will become weaker and weaker, suffering under Assyria’s mighty king.

### Israel Forgets God and Worships Idols

<sup>11</sup>“Israel built more and more altars for sin offerings,

but they have become places for them to sin.

<sup>12</sup>Every bit of my law is written down for them,

but they act as if they can’t understand a word.

<sup>13</sup>They offer sacrifices as gifts to me, and they eat the meat they offer.

But I, the LORD, do not accept their sacrifices.

I have not forgotten their sins, and I will punish them.

They will go back to slavery in Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>Israel has built palaces for its kings, and Judah has built many walled cities.

But they have forgotten their Maker.

So I will send fire to destroy their cities and the walls that protect them!”

### The Sadness of Captivity

**9** Israel, don’t shout for joy like other nations.

You have no reason to celebrate!

Like an unfaithful wife, you have left your God.

You love what your lovers have given you,

<sup>¶¶</sup>8:5 *Samaria ... idol* Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. The people of Israel made statues of calves and put them in the temples at Dan and Bethel. See 1 Kgs 12:26-30.

the piles of grain on your threshing floors.

<sup>2</sup> But soon there will not be enough grain to feed your people, and there will not be enough wine.

<sup>3</sup> So your people will not be able to stay in the LORD's land.

Israel<sup>§§</sup> will go back to Egypt.

And they will go to Assyria and eat forbidden food.

<sup>4</sup> They will not make wine offerings to the LORD.

They will not offer sacrifices of any kind to him.

And everything they eat will be like food at a funeral—

it will make anyone who eats it unclean. Their only use for food will be to satisfy their hunger.

They will not be able to offer it at the LORD's Temple.

<sup>5</sup> Your people will have no way to prepare sacrifices, no way to celebrate any of the LORD's festivals.

<sup>6</sup> And even if they escape this disaster, Egypt will capture them, and Memphis\* will bury them.

Weeds will grow over their silver treasures, and thorns will cover the places where they lived.

<sup>7</sup> The time for punishment has come, the time to pay for sins. And Israel will know they were wrong to say,

"The prophet is a fool; this man who speaks for God is crazy." You will be punished for your terrible sin and the hate you have shown.

<sup>8</sup> God has sent this prophet to warn Israel of danger,

but wherever he goes, people set traps to hurt him,

and they show their hate for him, even in the house of his God.

<sup>9</sup> My people have sunk deep into sin, as much as they did at Gibeah.

God will not forget the evil they have done, and he will punish them for their sins.

### Sin Has Ruined Israel's Hopes

<sup>10</sup> "When I found Israel, it was like finding fresh grapes in the desert.

When I first saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the first fruit on a fig tree.

But then they came to Baal Peor<sup>†</sup> and offered themselves to that shameful idol.

They became as disgusting as that idol they loved.

<sup>11</sup> "Israel's glory will fly away like a bird. You will stop having children. No woman will ever be expecting a baby or even get pregnant.

<sup>12</sup> But even if they ever have grown children, I will make sure they never have a grandchild.

When I leave them, they will have nothing but trouble and shame.

<sup>13</sup> I once saw Israel as a young palm planted in a meadow. But now Israel will soon lead their children out to be killed."

<sup>14</sup> LORD, give them what you will. And what should that be?

Make their women unable to have children or to nurse their babies.

<sup>§§</sup>9:3 *Israel* Literally, "Ephraim". See Ephraim in the Word List.

\*9:6 *Memphis* A city in Egypt famous for its burial grounds.

†9:10 *Baal Peor* See Num. 25:1-5.

### The Lord Judges Israel

<sup>15</sup>“All their evil began at Gilgal;  
I began hating them there.  
I will force them to leave my land  
because of the evil things they do.  
I will not love them any more.  
All their leaders have turned against me.

<sup>16</sup>Israel is dying, like a tree with a  
disease.

Its roots are dried up,  
and it cannot produce fruit.  
Even if they are able to have children,  
I will kill their precious babies.”

<sup>17</sup>The people of Israel have not obeyed  
my God,  
so he will reject them.  
And they will wander among the nations  
without a home.

### The Lord Will Punish Israel

**10** Israel was like a healthy vine  
that produced plenty of fruit.<sup>‡</sup>  
But the richer the people became,  
the more altars they built to honour false  
gods.  
The more their land produced,  
the more beautiful are the stones they set  
up for those gods.

<sup>2</sup>The people of Israel only pretend to  
honour God,  
and now they must pay for being  
unfaithful.

God will break down their altars  
and destroy the stones they have set up.

<sup>3</sup>They will soon say, “We have no king  
because we do not honour the LORD.

But what could a king do?

He could not help us.”

<sup>4</sup>They make promises they will not keep

and say things they do not mean.

Their judges make decisions that are  
harmful.

They are like poisonous weeds in a  
ploughed field.

<sup>5</sup>The people in Samaria tremble in fear  
of losing the calf-shaped idol they wor-  
ship at Beth-aven.<sup>¶</sup>

They were so proud of its beauty,  
but it will be taken away.

The people will be sad,  
and the priests who worshipped it will  
cry.

<sup>6</sup>It will be carried away to Assyria  
as a gift to the great king there.

This will bring nothing but shame to  
Israel,

shame for trusting in their idol.

<sup>7</sup>Samaria’s king will disappear  
like foam on the water’s surface.

<sup>8</sup>The places of worship in Aven<sup>§</sup> will be  
destroyed.

That’s where the people of Israel sinned.  
Thorny weeds will grow up  
and cover their altars.

The people will cry out to the mountains,  
“Cover us!”

and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

### The Lord Promises Punishment

<sup>9</sup>“Israel, you have not stopped sinning  
since that time at Gibeah.

There you began and nothing has  
changed.

And just as war came on those evil peo-  
ple at Gibeah,

so it will come on you.

<sup>10</sup>I will come to punish you.

Armies will come together against you  
and punish you for your double sins.<sup>\*\*</sup>

<sup>‡</sup>10:1 Or “Israel is like a damaged vine that once produced plenty of fruit.”

<sup>¶</sup>10:5 *Beth-aven* Beth-aven means “House of Evil”. It is a wordplay on the town’s real name, “Bethel”, meaning “House of God”.

<sup>§</sup>10:8 *Aven* A shorter form of Beth-aven, meaning Bethel. See note on verse 5.

<sup>\*\*</sup>10:10 This probably refers to worship at Gibeah and Beth-aven.

11 “Israel was like a well-trained young  
cow  
that loved the work of threshing grain.  
Seeing her fine neck,  
I thought I could put a yoke on it  
and she could plough the ground.  
I thought Jacob could prepare the land  
for planting.

12 I said, ‘Plant the seeds of goodness,  
and you will harvest faithful love.  
Prepare the hard ground of your hearts.  
Then wait for the LORD until he comes  
and makes goodness fall on you like  
rain.’

13 “But instead you planted evil  
and have harvested all that is wrong.  
You have eaten fruit produced by lies.  
You put your trust in your own power  
and in your great army.

14 So the noise of battle will surround  
your people.  
The enemy will destroy the walls pro-  
tecting your cities.  
They will do what Shalman<sup>††</sup> did when  
he destroyed Beth Arbel,  
when mothers and children were bashed  
to pieces.

15 That’s what will happen to you, peo-  
ple of Bethel,  
because you have done so much evil.  
As soon as that day begins,  
the king of Israel will be destroyed.

### Israel Rejected God’s Love

**11** “I loved Israel when he was a  
child,  
and I called my son out of Egypt.  
2 But the more I<sup>‡‡</sup> called my people,  
the farther they went from me.  
They kept offering sacrifices to false  
gods.

They burned offerings to idols of Baal.  
3 But I was the one who taught Israel to  
walk.

I took them in my arms.  
I was the one who healed them,  
but they did not understand this.

4 I led them along with kindness  
and with love.

I was like a farmer taking the yoke off  
his oxen  
to be able to feed them.

5 “But they refuse to turn back to me.  
So they will not go back to Egypt,  
but Assyria will rule over them.

6 War will sweep over their cities  
and completely destroy their villages.  
They will all be killed  
because of their own evil plans.

7 My people cannot make up their minds  
to turn to me.  
They are called to higher things,  
but they cannot help themselves.

### The Lord Will Not Destroy Israel

8 “Israel, I can’t give you up.  
I can’t let you go.  
I don’t want to destroy you,  
as I did the cities of Admah and Ze-  
boiim.<sup>¶¶</sup>

My heart rejects the idea.  
My love for you is too strong.  
9 I will not act out of my terrible anger.

I will not destroy Israel again.  
I am God, not a human.  
I am the Holy One among you.  
I will not come to you in anger.

10 I, the LORD, will roar like a lion,  
and my children will follow me.  
They will hear my roar  
and hurry to me from the west.

11 They will come flying back to me

<sup>††</sup>10:14 *Shalman* This is probably King Shalmaneser of Assyria.

<sup>‡‡</sup>11:2 *I* This is from the ancient Greek version. The traditional Hebrew text has “they”.

<sup>¶¶</sup>11:8 *Admah and Zeboiim* Two cities that were destroyed when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. See Gen. 19; Deut. 29:23.

like birds from Egypt,  
like doves from Assyria,  
and I will take them back home.”  
This is what the LORD says.

### God Complains About His People

<sup>12</sup> “Israel has filled my ears with lies.  
They have tried to fool me.  
And Judah still fights against God  
and continues to resist the Holy One.”<sup>§§</sup>

**12** Everything the people of Israel do  
is useless,  
like chasing the wind all day long.  
They tell more and more lies  
and do more and more harm.

They make agreements with Assyria  
and send olive oil to Egypt to pay for  
peace.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD also has a complaint against  
Judah.

He will soon punish the descendants of  
Jacob for the way they live.

They will pay for the bad things they  
have done.

<sup>3</sup> Even before Jacob was born,  
he tried to cheat his brother.\*  
And when he became a man,  
he fought with God.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob wrestled with God’s angel and  
won.†

Then, crying, he asked for a blessing.  
There at Bethel he met God,  
and there God spoke to us.

<sup>5</sup> This was the LORD God All-Powerful.  
His name is YAHWEH.

<sup>6</sup> So come back to your God;  
look to him for help.

Always act in love  
and do what is right.

Always depend on God!

<sup>7</sup> “Jacob’s people are like a clever  
merchant,  
who uses dishonest scales.  
They love to cheat.

<sup>8</sup> Israel says, ‘I am rich!  
I have made myself wealthy!’

And I did it without anyone seeing me  
cheat.

No one can say I did wrong.’

<sup>9</sup> “But I am the LORD your God,  
the same one who freed you from Egypt.  
Now I will make you live in tents,  
as you do during the Festival of Shel-  
ters.‡

<sup>10</sup> I am the one who spoke to the  
prophets  
and gave them many visions.  
I gave them many ways to warn you.”

<sup>11</sup> But the people in Gilead have ruined  
themselves  
with their wicked ways.

And in Gilgal the people sacrifice bulls.  
Their altars will look like the stones  
piled up by a ploughed field.

<sup>12</sup> Our ancestor Jacob ran away to Aram.  
There he<sup>¶</sup> worked to get a wife.

He took care of sheep to pay for her.

<sup>13</sup> Later, the LORD used a prophet to lead  
his people<sup>§</sup> out of Egypt,  
and by that prophet he kept them safe.

<sup>§§</sup>11:12 *And Judah ... Holy One* The difficult verbs here can also have a positive sense: “But Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.”

\*12:3 *he ... his brother* Or “he grabbed his brother’s heel.” The Hebrew word, “to grab the heel”, is like the name “Jacob” and came to mean “take over”, “trick” or “cheat”. Read Gen. 25:26.

†12:4 *Jacob ... won* Read Gen. 32:22-28.

‡12:3 *as ... Shelters* Literally, “as in the days of meeting”. This might also refer to the meeting of God with his people in the Holy Tent (see Holy Tent in the Word List) during their 40 years of wandering in the desert.

¶12:12 *he* Literally, “Israel”, another name for Jacob. See Israel in the Word List.

§12:13 *his people* Literally, “Israel”, Jacob’s descendants.

<sup>14</sup> But the people of Israel have made the Lord very angry, so he will punish them for their crimes. They must pay for insulting him.

### The Lord Accuses Israel

**13** The tribe of Ephraim made itself very important in Israel.

When they spoke, the other tribes shook with fear.

But the people of Ephraim sinned by worshipping Baal, which was their ruin.

<sup>2</sup> Now they sin more and more by making silver idols to worship. Skilled workers design and make these idols, then tell the people to offer sacrifices to them.

They tell the people to kiss those calf-shaped idols!

<sup>3</sup> So they will soon vanish like the morning mist, like the dew that disappears at dawn. They will be like chaff blown from the threshing floor, like smoke out of a window.

<sup>4</sup> "I have been the LORD your God since the time you were in Egypt. I am the only God you have ever known. I am the only one who can save you.

<sup>5</sup> I took care of you in the desert, in that land so hot and dry.

<sup>6</sup> I gave you food, and you ate all you wanted.

But when you were full, you became proud and forgot me.

<sup>7</sup> So now I will attack you like a lion; like a leopard I will hide and wait for you by the road.

<sup>8</sup> I will attack you like a bear robbed of her cubs,

and I will rip you open. Like a lion or other wild animal, I will tear you to pieces and eat you up.

### Israel Cannot Escape

<sup>9</sup> "Israel, I am ready to destroy you, and I am the only one who can help you. <sup>10</sup> Where is your king?

Can he save any of your cities? Where are the leaders you asked for when you said, 'give us a king and leaders'?\*\*

<sup>11</sup> I gave you a king, but only out of anger, and when I became even more angry, I took him away.

<sup>12</sup> "Israel cannot erase their guilt.†† A list of their sins has been stored away for the future.

<sup>13</sup> Pain will come to them, like that of a woman giving birth. But they are like a baby who doesn't know

that it is time to be born and will not come out.

<sup>14</sup> "Should I save them from the grave? Should I rescue them from death? No, I will not show them mercy. Come, death, bring your sickness! Come, grave, bring your power to destroy!

<sup>15</sup> Israel is like a healthy plant in the tall grass by the water, but a hot east wind will blow from the desert, a wind from the LORD.

And it will dry up their springs and wells.

It will take away everything of value they have stored.

\*\* **13:10** *Where ... and leaders* See 1 Sam. 8:4-9.

†† **13:12** *Israel ... guilt* Literally, "Ephraim's guilt has been tied up," which means that the sins they are guilty of have been written on a scroll, which has been rolled up, tied with a string and sealed.

<sup>16</sup>The people of Israel<sup>‡‡</sup> must be punished because they have turned against their God. They will be killed in war. Their children will be bashed to pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open.”

### Return to the Lord

**14** Israel, return to the LORD your God.

Your sin made you fall.

<sup>2</sup>So come back to the LORD, and be ready to say these words to him: “Take away all our sin.

Accept these sincere words of ours.

We offer you a sacrifice of praise.

<sup>3</sup>Assyria cannot save us.

War horses cannot help us.

We will never again say, ‘You are our gods’

to something we made with our hands.

You alone are the one who shows mercy to orphans.”

<sup>4</sup>The LORD says: “My people were unfaithful,

but I will make things right again.

I will show them my love without limit, because I have stopped being angry.

<sup>5</sup>Like a refreshing dew, I will bring blessing to Israel.

My people will blossom like the lily and grow strong like the cedar trees of Lebanon.

<sup>6</sup>They will be as beautiful as an olive tree

with branches spreading in all directions.

They will be as pleasant as a sweet-smelling forest in Lebanon.

<sup>7</sup>My people will again live under my protection.

They will grow like a crop of grain.

They will blossom like a vine.

They will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

<sup>8</sup>“Israel, there is no need for idols.

I am the one who answers your prayers and takes care of you.

I am like an evergreen tree.

Your blessings come from me.”

### Final Words

<sup>9</sup>If you are wise, you will understand these things.

If you are smart, you will pay attention to them.

The LORD’s ways are right.

Good people follow his ways, but sinners stumble and fall in them.

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<sup>‡‡</sup>**13:16** *people of Israel* Literally, “Samaria” one of Israel’s major cities. See Samaria in the Word List.