

## Love and Judgment: God's Problem (Hosea)



### SABBATH—APRIL 6

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Hosea 7:11, 12; Hosea 10:11–13; Matthew 11:28–30; Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; Hosea 14.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “People of Jacob, you must return to your God. You must hold on to love and do what is fair. You must trust in your God always” (Hosea 12:6, NlrV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** Hosea shows more of God's love for His backsliding (falling away from God) people.

**BIBLE WRITERS OFTEN USE METAPHORS<sup>1</sup> TO TALK ABOUT GOD'S LOVE RELATIONSHIP** with His people. People use metaphors to show something special about a lesser-known subject with something that is well-known to people. Metaphors are symbols. They are used to explain something other than themselves.

The two most common Bible metaphors about God's relationship with His people are husband-wife and parent-child metaphors. Last week we learned about the husband-wife metaphor. This week we will learn about a few more of Hosea's metaphors. The one used most is the parent-child metaphor.

Hosea used metaphors for the same reasons that Jesus taught in parables:<sup>2</sup> (1) to explain truths about God by using the familiar things of life; (2) to put pictures in people's minds about important spiritual principles (important rules) that could be used in everyday life.

1. metaphors—word-pictures or symbols; for example, the American flag is a symbol of America.

2. parables—very short stories that teach a lesson.

**SUNDAY—APRIL 7****EASILY TRICKED AND  
SENSELESS (MAKING NO SENSE)  
(Hosea 7:11, 12)**

**Read Hosea 7:11, 12 and compare<sup>3</sup> it with the things that were happening in Israel at the time. What warning is being given here? What principle can we learn from these verses?**

Ephraim was the name of the younger son of Joseph. Ephraim was also the name of the most important tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel. So, the name is used to mean the entire kingdom. In the same way the name Judah was used to mean the kingdom in the south. In the verses above, Israel is compared to a senseless (foolish) bird (compare Jeremiah 5:21). Israel lets itself become easily trapped by the bird catcher's net. This means that Israel was guilty of rebelling (fighting) against God because she asked other nations for help.

Why? Because friendship with the Assyrian Empire or Egypt would mean that Israel believed the gods of Assyria and Egypt were more powerful than God. (Read also Isaiah 52:4; Lamentations 5:1–6). Going to these nations would mean turning away from the Lord. What the people of Israel needed to do was return to the Lord, repent,<sup>4</sup> obey His commands, and put away their false gods. That was their only real hope, not

friendships with pagans.

“Israel was an easy target for invasion by Assyria and Egypt. . . . The prize that these powerful empires wanted and fought over was the highway that connected the rich rivers of the Nile and the Euphrates. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were located in between these two rivers and so were caught between Assyria and Egypt. Without spiritual trust in her God, Israel asked first the one and then the other for a support that could only turn into a trap for her.”—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, page 908.

**It is so easy to ask humans to help us with our problems instead of seeking the Lord, is it not? Of course, the Lord can use humans to answer our prayers. How can we be sure that when we need help we do not make the same mistake that Israel did? How can we use human help without turning away from the Lord?**



**Israel is compared to a foolish bird that lets itself be trapped by the bird catcher's net.**

3. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

4. repent—to feel sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**MONDAY—APRIL 8****A TRAINED HEIFER (COW)**

(Hosea 10:11–13)

**What message is the Lord giving to His people in Hosea 10:11–13? What do these words mean: “I will come and shower my blessings on you” (NirV)?**

In Hosea 10, God's child Ephraim (Israel) is compared to a trained cow who loves to harvest grain because she could eat it as she cut it down. This shows that instead of being useful, Israel had become very self-centered. But when God put a yoke<sup>5</sup> on Israel to work in open fields as the nation should, righteousness (holiness) and kindness grow.

In Bible times, the yoke was an example of service. Young cows were tamed by working on the threshing floor (Jeremiah 50:11). While yoked, the cows would grind out the corn with their feet. Next, they pulled a threshing sledge (sled) (2 Samuel 24:22, NIV) over the corn. This kind of work prepared the cows for the more disciplined task of plowing a row in a field (1 Kings 19:19; Jeremiah 4:3). God used the same plan when He trained Israel. He would put a “yoke” on Ephraim's “fair neck” (Hosea 10:11, NIV) to make him work hard as he plowed and broke up the soil.



**Hosea compares God's people to a lazy cow that likes to eat while it works.**

In Hosea 10:12 the prophet (special messenger) presents what the Lord wants Israel to become by obeying His word. Righteousness (right living) and steadfast (faithful) love are the gifts promised by God to His “wife” when the covenant is renewed (Hosea 2:19). If people plant righteousness, they will harvest kindness. Israel can save herself from the coming punishment only by searching for the Lord and His will. In other words, the door of mercy is still open for God's chosen people if they show repentance (sorrow for sins).

The warning to sow (plant) righteousness has to do with people-to-people relationships. Searching for God means searching for the relationship between God and His people. Breaking up the soil means doing spiritual and social reform<sup>6</sup> and renewal. So, the Lord and His people will work together in a close relationship to bring blessings back to the land. The

5. yoke—a bar or frame that is attached to the heads or necks of two work animals (such as oxen) so that they can pull a plow or heavy load.

6. reform—the improvement of something by making it better or correcting faults or problems.

result will be a glorious blossoming (blooming) that will fill the whole earth (Hosea 14:5–7).

**Read Christ's invitation that asks us to take His yoke upon ourselves (Matthew 11:28–30). How can learning from Christ to be "gentle and free of pride" (verse 28, NIV) help us to find rest (peace) for our souls?**



The door of mercy is still open for God's people.

## TUESDAY—APRIL 9

### A TODDLING<sup>7</sup> SON (Hosea 11:1, 3)

In these verses, Hosea is saying that the Lord is like (about the same as) a new parent in His tender care of Israel. A parent tenderly and patiently teaches a child to walk. The parent takes the child up by his or her hands to prevent the child from falling. The Lord cared for Israel in the same way right from the beginning. God loves and forgives, and He is the heart (center) of Hosea's mes-

sage. God's anger can be terrible. But when God punishes, He is very merciful. Yet, our understanding of His mercy is limited.

**Read Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:6; and Revelation 3:19. What is the one point that these verses all share or make? What comfort can we take from them?**

God used Moses to tell the Egyptian king that Israel was His special child (Exodus 4:22, 23). All the nations of the earth, including Egypt, were God's sons and daughters. But the Hebrew nation was chosen to be God's firstborn son with special rights and honors. However, responsibilities came with those rights and honors. For example, in the wilderness the Lord carried His people in the same way in which "a father carries his son" (Deuteronomy 1:31, NIV). And at times He punished them just as "a man disciplines [punishes] his son" (Deuteronomy 8:5, NIV).

"In this world all the people who do God's work receive training in the school of sorrow. The more important the work that a person is given to do, the harder the test."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 151.

Any parent who loves his children will discipline (punish) them. It is always for their own good. If imperfect humans do that, how much more so can we trust in God's love for us when He does it, as well?

7. toddling—walking like a baby.

For many of us, the problem is not that we do not trust God's discipline. Instead, the problem is that we must try to understand the trials (hardship; troubles) that happen to us. How can we tell when God is using trials to teach us from the "school of sorrow" or when the trials mean something else? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



God carried His people in the same way that a father carries his son.

### WEDNESDAY—APRIL 10

#### COMPASSION (MERCY) STRONGER THAN ANGER (Hosea 11:8, 9)

Hosea 11:8, 9 helps us to know God's heart. Will God hand over His rebellious (hard to control) son to be stoned to death as the law demands (Deuteronomy 21:18–21; read also Genesis 19:17–23)? What a wonderful picture of both God's own suffering from human sin and His desire to save us.

Sinful Israel should have been completely destroyed. But the Lord,

in His enduring (lasting; permanent) mercy, continued to love His people while working hard on improving their spiritual lives.

In Abraham's time there were five cities located (found) in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea (Genesis 14:8). They were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. They were known as "the cities of the plain." Of these five cities, only Zoar was not destroyed. The other four became famous when they were destroyed because of their wicked ways and unwillingness to repent (Deuteronomy 29:23). These were some of the cities that Hosea was talking about in the above verses.

Hosea 11 teaches that God's ways are better than those of sinful humans. God will not let His bitter feelings influence His decisions. God's love seeks to bring healing, health, and restoration (renewal) to His people. The reason that God disciplines is to correct and improve people, not to destroy and punish them. Many people, even those who say they are Christians, do not understand this part of God. Instead, they think He is just angry and looking for ways to punish them for their sins. Even worse, some believe that God burns the lost in hell for eternity. But that is not the true picture of God that is presented in the Bible.

**Read Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; and Galatians 3:13. How do these verses show God's unlimited love for humans?**

**THURSDAY—APRIL 11****HEALED, LOVED, AND TAKEN CARE OF (Hosea 14)**

**Some Bible thinkers thought that the Lord of the Old Testament was very strict and unforgiving. To them Jesus was different in the New Testament. Why do they have such a wrong idea? How does the message of Hosea 14 help us to understand just how wrong that idea is? What does this chapter show about God's character (who God is) and love for His people?**

The last chapter of Hosea is a perfect way to end the message preached by the prophet. This is because it repeats the promise that God's salvation will not fail. The chapter begins with Hosea calling people to turn away from all sins. Hosea encourages the people to return to God. The prophet gives them the words they should say in worship. He says that the people should ask that God take away the guilt that made them fall. They should also break away from the other nations and completely refuse to take part in idol worship. In Bible times no person was supposed to appear before the Lord without gifts or sacrifices (Exodus 23:15). Beyond bringing an animal sacrifice, the people are told to bring words of true repentance as their thanksgiving offering.

Then, after the people have truly confessed their sins, God answers

with a series of promises. One of the most important promises is that the people's health problems will be healed by God, their Physician (Doctor). God's renewed relationship with Israel is much the same as the dew that gives water to flowers and trees during the long and dry summer season in Palestine. The olive tree is also a symbol here of God's renewed relationship with His people. The leaves of the olive tree give shade and freshness. Its oil is used for food, lotion, and fuel for lights. Lastly, the great cedars of Lebanon are known as the most useful of the large trees in the lands of the Bible. Their valuable lumber was used to build temples and royal palaces (1 Kings 6:9, 10). The roots planted by God will grow into fresh plants so that Israel will become a garden full of blessings for the whole world.

**Read the last verse of the chapter. What must be done so that all of these promises will be fulfilled? Why is it not any different for us today in our work as Seventh-day Adventists?**

**FRIDAY—APRIL 12**

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Compare the following two quotations with the messages presented in Hosea 7–14.

“God used nature, symbols, patriarchs,<sup>8</sup> and prophets to speak to the world. Lessons must be given

8. patriarchs—leaders of God's people in early Bible times.

to people in their own language. . . . The principles of God's government and the plan of salvation must be explained very clearly. The lessons of the Old Testament must be given to men."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 34.

"Through long, dark years, king after king rebelled against Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idol worship. Then God sent message after message to His backslidden [fallen] people. God used His prophets to give them every opportunity to stop backsliding and to return to Him. . . . Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without warnings from the mighty power of God to save them from sin. Even in the darkest hours some faithful people would remain true to their God. In the midst of the world of idol worship these people would remain loyal and perfect in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were counted among the saved who would fulfill the eternal purpose of God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 108.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① It has been suggested that through

Hosea's life and ministry (work done for God), God's word to Israel was put in human form. How is this idea only a small example of the great truth about Jesus in human form? Read John 1:14.

② Israel in Bible times did not backslide from God all at once. Instead, its backsliding happened slowly. Prepare to share with your class members how we can remain faithful to God's eternal principles in a world that is always changing.

③ Some people believe that the gospel message about God's great love and salvation is given only in the New Testament and not in the Old Testament. What is wrong with that idea?

④ In class, go over your answer to Tuesday's final question.

⑤ The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus Christ and the apostle (teacher and leader) Paul read. Look into the New Testament quotes from Hosea that are found in Matthew 9:13 and Romans 9:25, 26. How did Jesus and Paul use the gospel message in Hosea to preach truth to us?