

# Love *and* Judgment: God’s Dilemma (Hosea)



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Hos. 7:11, 12; 10:11–13; Matt. 11:28–30; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; Hosea 14.*

**Memory Text:** “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (*Hosea 12:6, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Hosea reveals more of God’s love for His wayward people.

A common way in which biblical authors talk about God’s love relationship with His people is by using metaphors. A metaphor conveys something profound about a lesser-known subject through something that is already known or familiar. Metaphors are symbols used to explain something other than themselves.

The two most commonly used biblical metaphors regarding God’s relationship with His people are husband-wife and parent-child metaphors. Last week we looked at the husband-wife metaphor. This week we will look into a few more of Hosea’s metaphors, the most dominant of which is the parent-child one.

Hosea used metaphors for the same reasons that Jesus taught in parables: first, to explain truths about God through the familiar things of life; second, to impress on people’s minds important spiritual principles that could be applied to everyday existence.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.*

## Easily Deceived and Senseless

“ ‘Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them’ ” (Hos. 7:11, 12, NIV). Read these verses in context. What warning is being given here? What principle can we take from these verses for ourselves?

---



---



---

Ephraim was the name of the younger son of Joseph. Because Ephraim was the name of the principal tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the name is applied to the entire kingdom, just as the name Judah was applied to the kingdom in the south. In the above verses, Israel is compared to a senseless bird (*compare Jer. 5:21*), allowing itself to be an easy prey for the fowler’s net. In this context, her reliance on other nations for help was an act of rebellion against God.

Why? Because an alliance with the mighty Assyrian Empire or ambitious Egypt would require Israel to recognize the supremacy of the gods worshiped by those two superpowers (*see also Isa. 52:4, Lam. 5:1–6*). Going to them would mean, by necessity, turning away from the Lord. What Israel needed to do was return to the Lord, repent, obey His commandments, and put away its gods. That was their only hope, not political alliances with pagans.

“The very position of Palestine exposed it to invasion by these two ancient empires. . . . The much-coveted prize for which these powerful empires fought was this highway that connected the rich watersheds of the Nile and the Euphrates. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were caught in this international counterplay and squeezed between the two rivals. In desperation, without spiritual trust in her God, Israel fatuously appealed first to the one and then to the other for a support that could only turn into a snare to her own national well-being.”  
—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 908.

**It is so easy to seek human aid for our problems instead of seeking the Lord, is it not? Of course, the Lord can use human agents in answer to our prayers. How can we be sure that, in desperate situations and in need of help, we do not make the same mistake that Israel did here? How can we use human aid without, by necessity, turning away from the Lord?**

## A Trained Heifer

**Read** Hosea 10:11–13. What message is the Lord giving to His people here? How do we understand the phrase, “until he comes and showers righteousness on you”? (*NIV*).

---

---

---

In Hosea 10, God’s child, Ephraim, is compared to a trained heifer who loves to thresh grain because she can eat as she threshes. Thus, instead of being productive, Israel’s existence has become self-centered. When God yokes Israel to work in the open fields as the nation should, righteousness and kindness grow instead.

In Bible times, the yoke was an instrument of service. Young beasts of burden were trained to be docile by working first on the threshing floor (*Jer. 50:11*). While yoked, they simply would tread out corn with their feet. At the next stage, they pulled a threshing sledge over the corn (*2 Sam. 24:22, NIV*). This type of work prepared them for the more disciplined task of plowing a furrow in a field (*1 Kings 19:19, Jer. 4:3*). God had a similar plan in His training of Israel. He would put a yoke on Ephraim’s fair neck to make him work hard in the plowing and breaking up of the soil.

In Hosea 10:12 the prophet presents what the Lord desires Israel to be through obedience to His word. In turn, righteousness and steadfast love are the gifts promised by God to His wife when the covenant is renewed (*Hos. 2:19*). If people sow this righteousness, they will reap kindness in return. Therefore, only by searching for the Lord and His will can Israel be delivered from the coming punishment. The door of mercy is still open for possible repentance on the part of God’s chosen people.

The admonition to sow righteousness concerns people-to-people relationships; the search for God concerns the relationship between God and His people. The breaking up of the soil represents spiritual and social reform and renewal. Thus, the Lord and His people will work together in a mutual relationship to bring blessings back to the land. The results will be a glorious blossoming that will fill the whole earth (*Hos. 14:5–7*).

**Read** Christ’s invitation to take His yoke upon ourselves (*Matt. 11:28–30*). How can learning from Christ to be “gentle and humble in heart” (*NIV*) help us to find rest for our souls?

---

## A Toddling Son

**“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. . . . I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them” (Hos. 11:1, 3, NKJV).**

In these verses, Hosea is saying that the Lord’s way is like the tender care of a new parent. Just as a parent tenderly and patiently teaches a child to walk, taking it up by its hands to prevent its fall, so the Lord has cared for Israel right from the beginning. God, who loves and forgives, is the heart of Hosea’s message. Even when He applies discipline, He is deeply compassionate. His anger can be terrifying, but His mercy is beyond comprehension.

**Read Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 13:24, Hebrews 12:6, and Revelation 3:19. What is the one point that these verses all have in common? What comfort can we draw from these texts?**

---

---

Through Moses, God informed the Egyptian king that Israel was His special child (*Exod. 4:22, 23*). Although all the nations of the earth, including Egypt, were God’s sons and daughters, the Hebrew nation was selected to be God’s firstborn son with special privileges. But along with those privileges came responsibilities. In the wilderness the Lord carried His people in the same way in which “a father carries his son” (*Deut. 1:31, NIV*). At times He disciplined them just like “a man disciplines his son” (*Deut. 8:5, NIV*).

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 151.

There is no question that any parent who loves his children will discipline them, and always for their own good. If flawed and fallen humans do this, how much more so can we trust in God’s love for us, even during times of trial?

**For many of us, the issue is not about trusting God’s discipline. Rather, the struggle is knowing how to interpret the trials that come our way. How do we know if what we are going through is, indeed, God teaching us in the “school of sorrow” or if it is something else? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

---

## Compassion Stronger Than Anger

**“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath”** (*Hos. 11:8, 9, NASB*).

This passage serves as a window into God’s heart: will God hand His rebellious son over to be stoned to death as required by law (*Deut. 21:18–21; see also Gen. 19:17–23*)? What an amazing insight into both God’s own suffering due to human sin and His desire to save us.

Even though sinful Israel deserved total destruction, the Lord in His enduring mercy continues to love His people while striving for their repentance.

In Abraham’s time there were five cities situated in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea (*Gen. 14:8*). Known as “the cities of the plain,” they were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Of these, only Zoar was not destroyed. The names of the other four became proverbial for the total destruction that came upon them due to their wicked ways and unwillingness to repent (*Deut. 29:23*). It was to some of these cities that Hosea was referring in the above verses.

Hosea 11 teaches that God’s ways transcend those of sinful humanity. He will not let bitterness govern His decisions. God’s love seeks to bring healing, health, and restoration to His people. The purpose of divine discipline is to correct, amend, and reconcile, not to destroy and avenge. Many people, even professed Christians, do not understand that aspect of God; instead, they see Him as vengeful, angry, and just looking to find fault with them in order to punish them for their sins. Even worse, some believe that He burns the lost in hell for eternity. That, however, is not the picture of God presented here.

**Read Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, and Galatians 3:13. How do these texts, even more than the ones we see in Hosea, reveal the extent of God’s love for humanity?**

---

---

---

---

## Healed, Loved, and Nurtured

**Some** ancient scholars viewed the Lord as harsh and unforgiving, as revealed in the Old Testament, but in contrast to Jesus, as revealed in the New. Why is that such a wrong conclusion? How does the message of Hosea 14 help to show just how wrong that conclusion is? What does this chapter reveal about God's character and love for His people?

---

---

---

The last chapter of Hosea is a fitting climax to the message proclaimed by the prophet. It reaffirms the promise that God's salvation will have the last word. The chapter opens with one more call for the people to turn away from all iniquity. In bidding the people to return to God, the prophet supplies the actual words that they should say in worship. Their request should be that God take away the guilt that made them stumble. They should also renounce their dependence on the other nations and totally reject idolatry. In Bible times no person was supposed to appear before the Lord empty-handed (*Exod. 23:15*). So, beyond bringing an animal sacrifice, the people are told to bring words of genuine repentance as their thanksgiving offering.

Then, following a penitential confession on the people's part, God responds with a series of promises. The foremost of these is the healing of the people's maladies by the divine Physician. God's renewed relationship with Israel is likened to the dew that provides the only moisture available to flowers and trees during the long and dry summer season in Palestine. It is also linked to the olive tree, which is considered especially valuable, a sort of crown of the fruit trees. Its foliage provides shade and freshness, and its oil is used as food, skin lotion, and as fuel for lights. Additionally, the great cedars of Lebanon are considered the most useful of the large-growth trees in the lands of the Bible. Their highly prized lumber serves for the construction of temples and royal palaces (*1 Kings 6:9, 10*). The roots planted by God will produce such an abundance of fresh plants that Israel will become a garden full of blessings for the whole world.

**Read the last verse of the chapter. What conditions are required for all these promises to be fulfilled? Why is it no different for us today, in our role as Seventh-day Adventists?**

---

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

“Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. . . . The principles of God’s government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 34.

“Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. . . . Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Even in the darkest hours some would remain true to their divine Ruler and in the midst of idolatry would live blameless in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were numbered among the goodly remnant through whom the eternal purpose of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 108.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It has been suggested that through Hosea’s life and ministry, God’s word to Israel had in a sense “became flesh.” How is this idea only a small reflection of the great truth about the humanity of Jesus? See *John 1:14*.
- ❷ Ancient Israel did not depart from God overnight. Instead, its apostasy was a gradual process. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which one can remain faithful to God’s eternal principles in a constantly changing world.
- ❸ Some people believe that the gospel message about God’s great love and salvation is presented clearly only in the New Testament and not in the Old. What is wrong with that idea?
- ❹ In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- ❺ The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul read. Look into the New Testament quotations 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 proclaim truth to us?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hosea 12:6*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize God's covenant faithfulness toward His people despite their unfaithfulness. Understand that returning to God is a response to His initiative and is enabled by Him because only He Himself can heal our waywardness.

**Feel:** Acknowledge how the lack of the knowledge of God contributes to our destruction and how God's healing is closely connected with a whole-hearted return to God.

**Do:** Patiently wait for God and cultivate love with justice in his or her life.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: The Faithfulness of God Versus Our Unfaithfulness

- A** How do God's goodness and kindness lead us to repentance?
- B** Why can we return to God only with the help of His grace?
- C** In what way do you think Hosea was affected by the messages given to him?

### II. Feel: Love, Emotions, and Knowledge

- A** In what ways can our sins make us aware of our need of healing?
- B** Why is the lack of the knowledge of God so destructive?

### III. Do: Love and Justice in Balance

- A** Why is waiting for God so difficult for us today in our culture?
- B** What can we do in order to maintain a balance between love and justice?
- C** Is it better to err on the side of love or justice?

► **Summary:** The right understanding of the character of God and His actions attracts people to return to Him and to emulate His faithfulness, love, and justice.



## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Hosea 14:1–4*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** God wants to save His people, even though they neither recognize nor acknowledge His love. He, therefore, wants to make them aware of their destructive behavior and of His infinite and faithful love. He is their Husband, even though they choose to follow their own desires. He does everything possible to win back their trust and build a loving relationship with them, in spite of their pursuit of many lovers.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson should help members of your class to be aware that God’s love is greater than we can imagine (*Eph. 3: 20, 21*). We cannot do anything to make Him love us more—or less. Nothing and no one can separate us from His love (*Rom. 8:35–39*).

**Opening Discussion:** After finishing his studies in the MDiv program at Andrews University, Pastor Ruimar DePaiva and his family went to the Pacific island of Palau to serve as missionaries. A terrible tragedy struck the family in December 2003. A robber came during the night into their house and attacked the eleven-year-old son, Larisson, who tried to defend himself. The fight awakened the father, who came to help, followed by the mother, Margareth. All were murdered by the man with a heavy wooden stick. Only Melissa (the ten-year-old daughter) survived, but she was horribly abused and then strangled. Early the next morning, she woke up, bloodied, in a canal in the woods. She crawled to the highway, stopped a car, and was taken to the hospital. Ruth DePaiva, the grandmother of Melissa, and mother of Ruimar, traveled to Palau to be with her granddaughter. During the funeral service, she learned that the mother of the murderer was attending. She invited her to come up, and then she said publicly: “We here are two mothers, grieving for our lost sons. We gave them our best, we hoped for the best, looked to their future, we educated them, but today we are both in pain. The DePaiva family is not blaming the Hiroso family. . . . I am sure the mother of Justin has prayed so many times for her son, and I am sure her heart hurts terribly. We will pray for her and for Justin.” She went to the prison and said to the murderer, Justin Hiroso: “I have to tell you two things: (1) You need Christ! and (2) I forgive you!”

What do you think? Is it right to forgive that which seems “unforgivable”? Discuss the reasons for your answer. What would be your

reaction in such a situation? Is forgiveness a weakness or a divine action? Explain.

## ► **STEP 2**—Explore

### Bible Commentary

#### I. The Miserable Spiritual Situation of God’s People *(Review Hosea 4:1, 2, 6 with your class.)*

Consider carefully Hosea’s texts that describe Israel’s weak spirituality and ungodliness. Mention the following charges of God against Israel: “‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed’ ” (*Hos. 4:1, 2, NIV*); “‘my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge . . . you have ignored the law of your God’ ” (*Hos. 4:6, NIV*); “‘they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful’ ” (*Hos. 4:7, NIV*); “‘a spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God’ ” (*Hos. 4:12, NIV*); “‘a people without understanding will come to ruin!’ ” (*Hos. 4:14, NIV*); “‘a spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD’ ” (*Hos. 5:4, NIV*); “‘your love is like the morning mist’ ” (*Hos. 6:4*); “‘they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me’ ” (*Hos. 6:7, NIV*); “‘they practice deceit, thieves break into houses, bandits rob in the streets; but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them’ ” (*Hos. 7:1, 2, NIV*); “‘they are all adulterers’ ” (*Hos. 7:4, NIV*); “‘none of them calls on me’ ” (*Hos. 7:7, NIV*); “‘Israel’s arrogance testifies against him, . . . he does not return to the LORD his God or search for him’ ” (*Hos. 7:10, NIV*); “‘they have rebelled against me’ ” (*Hos. 7:13, NIV*); “‘they do not cry out to me from their hearts’ ” (*Hos. 7:14, NIV*); “‘they do not turn to the Most High’ ” (*Hos. 7:16, NIV*); “‘the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law’ ” (*Hos. 8:1, NIV*); “‘Israel has forgotten his Maker’ ” (*Hos. 8:14, NIV*); “‘you have been unfaithful to your God’ ” (*Hos. 9:1, NIV*); they became “‘as vile as the thing they loved’ ” (*Hos. 9:10, NIV*); “‘they have not obeyed Him’ ” (*Hos. 9:17, NIV*); “‘you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil’ ” (*Hos. 10:13, NIV*); “‘Ephraim [another term for Israel] boasts, “I am very rich; I have become wealthy” ’ ” (*Hos. 12:8, NIV*).

**Consider This:** It might be said, as in the case of Israel in Hosea’s time, that God’s people are sometimes more stubborn in coming to God than pagans or unbelievers are. Perhaps this problem could have something

to do with their understanding of truth and the false sense of security that possessing it and professing it outwardly brings, while inwardly denying its power to transform the life. How can these verses teach us the importance of not simply being possessors of the Truth (Jesus) but of letting Truth possess us?

## II. God's Covenantal Faithfulness *(Review Hosea 6:1–3 with your class.)*

The prophet Hosea paints an incredibly beautiful picture of God as One who always seeks sinners, offers His love, and abundantly cares for their needs. Consider the following texts: “‘he will heal us . . . he will bind up our wounds’ ” (*Hos. 6:1, NIV*); “‘he will revive us; . . . he will restore us, that we may live in his presence’ ” (*Hos. 6:2, NIV*); “‘as surely as the sun rises, he [the Lord] will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains’ ” (*Hos. 6:3, NIV*); “‘It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love’ ” (*Hos. 11:3, 4, NIV*); “‘How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath’ ” (*Hos. 11:8, 9, NIV*); “‘But I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me. I cared for you in the desert’ ” (*Hos. 13:4, 5, NIV*); “‘I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?’ ” (*Hos. 13:14, NIV; compare with 1 Cor. 15:55*); “‘I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily’ ” (*Hos. 14:4, 5, NIV*).

**Consider This:** Taken together, these texts form a composite portrait of God's character. What does that portrait look like? What do these texts tell us about God?

**Activity:** Ask members of your class to open their Bibles and share other verses that are dear to them about God's love and His promises of care for us.

## III. Return to the Lord Your God *(Review Hosea 5:1 with your class.)*

The prophet Hosea announces God's abundant calls for the return of Israel to the Lord. Consider the following appeals and statements: “‘They will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me’ ” (*Hos. 5:15, NIV*); “‘Come, let us return to the LORD’ ” (*Hos. 6:1, NIV*); “‘Let us acknowledge the LORD’ ” (*Hos. 6:3, NIV*); “‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings’ ” (*Hos. 6:6, NIV*); “‘You must return to your God;

maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (*Hos. 12:6, NIV*); “Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously’ ” (*Hos. 14:1, 2, NIV*).

**Discussion Question:** Why are even God’s people often more interested in God’s blessing than in wholeheartedly following His directions? (*See Hos. 7:14, 15.*)

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The book of Hosea ends with a question: “Who is wise?” The answer is plain: the one who can discern God’s ways and walk in them (*Hos. 14:9*). This definition of wisdom is simple yet profound. Discuss with your class how one can become wise in order to differentiate between good and evil and follow what is good and right.

**Life Application:** God says through Hosea that our “fruitfulness comes from [Him]” (*Hos. 14:8, NIV*). This reminds us of Jesus’ discourse about Him being the Vine, and us being the branches. We can bear fruit only if we abide in Him (*see John 15:1–17*). Apply this saying to practical life. In what ways can we remain in God in order to be fruitful?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The husband-wife metaphor for God and His people is rich in imagery. What are the advantages and shortcomings of such illustrations?

#### Activities:

① Hosea compares God to different things that are common in his culture in order to bring God closer to the people so that they may understand Him better (*see Hos. 14:5–8*). Ask your class to come up with modern twenty-first-century pictures, metaphors, similes, and concepts that would speak to the mind of our postmodern society. Be creative. Conduct this exercise especially with the youth in mind. How do we communicate to them the beauty of our God?

② Find in your hymnal songs about God’s faithfulness and invite your class to learn the best by heart.