

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(August 30, 2009)

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Ancient Guides for Troubled Times (studies in the Minor Prophets)

#### **Love's Call to Repentance**

(the prophecy of Hosea)

Study #2

#### Introduction: The motives that drive change ...

Years ago, Saddleback Community Church in California put together a training program designed to equip people to serve in various ministry positions. They called the program S.H.A.P.E.<sup>1</sup>

As a way of introducing this plan for getting people involved in service, the S.H.A.P.E. training manual outlined the way churches are sometimes tempted to recruit volunteers.

It all starts with **NEED**. Could be anything - Sunday School teacher or helper, Committee Chair, Care Group Leader or something else equally weighty. Needs abound in every church. It's not hard to find a need. Once the need is identified and announced, it's time for step two.

Look for an **AVAILABLE** person. There are lots of people who are busy in churches. But some people aren't doing much at all. These are the people to target. And once the available person is on the recruiter's radar, it's time for step three.

Use **GUILT** to induce the **AVAILABLE** person to meet the service **NEED!**

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<sup>1</sup> An acronym for **S**piritual giftedness, **H**eart desire, **A**bilities, **P**ersonality, **E**xperiences.

If Saddleback uses **S.H.A.P.E.**, others use **N.A.G.!**

Tragically, this is the path some churches and some people and some other organizations do actually use to accomplish the work they believe needs to be done. Move things forward through the shrewd and forceful application of N.A.G.ging.

I suspect that if you and I were to conduct "man/woman on the street" interviews, asking a couple of dozen people what means churches and other non-profits used most often to recruit volunteers and to promote life change, many would cite "guilt" "shame" "arm-twisting" "fear" and other manipulative ploys.

This is tragic, because the Bible knows nothing of guilt- or shame-based motivation.

Guilt and shame are realities that must be faced when sinful behavior is involved. And, when guilt is admitted and forgiveness is sought, there is a wonderful experience of the grace of God.

But when God wants to motivate His people to life change, He puts in place a whole different strategy and uses wholly different tools to prompt that change.

Nowhere is the clear distinction between "nagging" and God's method of prompting change more apparent than in the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea.

Hosea is the first Minor Prophet to appear in our Bibles. He was almost certainly not the first of the twelve to write, but he was among the first.<sup>2</sup> And he wrote to call the people of God to repentance.

Anyone who reads Hosea will see that there is, in this little book, some threatening language. And because we find Hosea using that kind of language, we could be tempted to believe that he was playing the "guilt and shame" cards to drive the change he was seeking.

But this would be to seriously misread the book.

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<sup>2</sup> We believe that the dates of the earliest Minor Prophets were: Obadiah - 840 BC; Jonah - 800BC; Amos - 755BC; Hosea - 740BC.

Looked at more carefully, we'll see that there is not a fuller, more tender, more compassionate picture of the love of God for His people to be found anywhere in the Old Testament than what we find in Hosea.

The overwhelmingly clear message of Hosea as he seeks to prompt change is this: Repent, your God is crazy about you!

## Background to Hosea

### *Who was Hosea?*

Hosea lived and prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel. This is to say that he lived in a land of apostasy.<sup>3</sup>

Judah, in the south, continued to serve the one, true God. The Kings of Judah were all descendants of David. And, while there were some really bad southern kings, there were also some really good ones.

Sadly, there was no inconsistency at all in the north. Not one of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel served and worshipped the Lord. They were all apostates. None of them descended from David and none of them loved the Lord as David had.

But God didn't forget about the northern kingdom. And He showed His continuing concern for them by sending prophets who told them to return to the Lord. Among the most articulate and passionate of the northern prophets was Hosea.<sup>4</sup>

His name means "salvation"<sup>5</sup>, and some have referred to Hosea as the Old Testament prophet of grace.<sup>6</sup> Even though he finds himself in the books we call "Minor Prophets, Hosea was no *minor* prophet!<sup>7</sup>

He was a contemporary of the southern prophets Isaiah and Micah,<sup>8</sup> and he wrote in the years leading up to the days when Israel would fall to the Assyrian Empire.<sup>9</sup>

### *Condition of Hosea's audience*

Hosea's society was the society of King Jeroboam II. In his days, Israel was economically prosperous. And politically, Jeroboam II ruled over an area larger than any since the days of Solomon (2 Kings 14:25), with Israel's reach extending north as far as Damascus.

But if there was prosperity and political stability, Israel was a spiritual wasteland. False worship abounded. Violence was everywhere. Immorality was the order of the day.

### *Purpose of the book*

And here comes Hosea to grab his fellow Jews by the throat, seeking to turn their hearts back to the Lord.

So why are we exploring this book written to the people of God in ancient Israel in 800 BC? Simple. There is no book in the Bible better suited to believers who struggle with sin and need to travel the road to repentance than Hosea.

Like the Israelites of the 8th century BC, Christians in 2009 struggle with sin. I do. You do, too. We need not only to be told to NOT sin - we need a sufficient reason to not sin and an assurance that it is worth it to not sin. Hosea gives us all of that.

Many of the prophets began their books with a resounding, "***Thus saith the Lord...***" Hosea opens his book by telling us God's commands for his home life.

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<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the reign of Solomon, the nation of the Jews divided. The northern kingdom became known as Israel, the southern as Judah.

<sup>4</sup> The other two prophets to the north were Amos and Jonah.

<sup>5</sup> A form of the Hebrew word "yeshua" which is also the name of Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> He is quoted about thirty times in the New Testament.

<sup>7</sup> I want to make clear that the "minor prophets" are called "minor" because of length. In Russia, they are called (much more appropriately) the "small prophets."

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<sup>8</sup> These prophets ministered in Judah.

<sup>9</sup> Of all the prophets, Hosea may have had the longest active ministry. As the first verse of his book tells us, while he prophesied, the kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah sat on the throne of Judah, while Jeroboam II ruled in Israel. Hosea's career spanned as much as 65-70 years. Clearly, Jeroboam II reigned a long time!

## A Tale of Unrequited Love (1:1--2:1)

### Hosea's Domestic Life

#### *Marriage to Gomer (1:2)*

Hosea was told to marry an immoral woman, a prostitute. Hosea obeyed. We learn later that the woman's name is Gomer. In the course of time, Hosea and Gomer had children - two sons and a daughter.

#### *Son - Jezreel (1:3)*

The firstborn son was to be named "Jezreel." Jezreel is a valley in Palestine and has been the site of a number of famous military battles in Jewish history.

#### *Other children (1:6-9)*

Then, Gomer and Hosea produced two more children. First, a daughter they were to name "Lo-ruhamah." Then, a son. God told Hosea to name his son, "Lo-ammi."

These family details serve as a living parable of the nation's future.

### God and Israel

#### *Gomer*

God's command that His righteous prophet should marry a practicing prostitute was a command with a point.

***[1:2] When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord."***

Hosea's marriage to Gomer was a picture of the spiritual harlotry that Israel had been committing against the Lord.

When God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, He considered that He had married her. But after this "wedding," she had played the harlot, meaning that she had worshipped other gods.

Hosea's children, too, were symbols. They were symbols of the way God was going to deal with the nation of Israel.

#### *The children of Hosea and Gomer*

Jezreel was their first child.<sup>10</sup> The relevant story of Jezreel is found in 2 Kings 10. It is an ugly story of bloodshed and betrayal. Because of the treachery of Jehu (a Jew) at Jezreel,<sup>11</sup> God is going to put an end to Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Gomer and Hosea's little girl was to be named "**Lo-ruhamah.**" Lo-ruhamah means "no compassion" in Hebrew. The point? God would soon no longer have compassion on Israel.<sup>13</sup>

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***<sup>10</sup> [1:3] So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. [4] And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. [5] On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."***

<sup>11</sup> Even though he was killing Ahab at the command of God.

<sup>12</sup> Naboth the Jezreelite was murdered so that Ahab could have his vineyard, which was located near the royal palace. Ahab was punished (killed) at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22) and Jezebel was killed by Jehu (2 Kings 9). Jehu was the instrument of God to bring about the end of the house of Ahab. But, he was bloodthirsty and filled with pride and ambition (2 Kings 9ff). He even committed idolatry! God (through Hosea) promised that He would punish the house of Jehu - of which the current King, Jeroboam II, was a part - for the crimes which Jehu committed at Jezreel. The point to make here is that even though Jehu was called by God to execute judgment against Israel (Ahab was a Jew), in not keeping his own heart clean he opened himself up to judgment, just as had happened to Egypt and Babylon and Assyria, all of whom were designated instruments of chastisement against Israel, but who were all judged for their acts of chastisement later. Fulfillment was seen in that Jehu's house (the dynasty of Jeroboam II) was destroyed in the valley of Jezreel (the Plain of Esdraelon in central Palestine) forty years after this prophecy when Shalmaneser of Assyria defeated Israel.

***<sup>13</sup> [1:6] Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel (the northern kingdom), that I would ever forgive them. [7] But I will have compassion on the house of Judah (the southern kingdom) and deliver them by the Lord their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses or horsemen."***

The third child born to Hosea and Gomer was another son, “*Lo-ammi*.” In Hebrew, Lo-ammi means “*Not My people*.” Israel’s sin was so great that God would soon no longer call them His people.<sup>14</sup>

Israel was ripe for judgment. In the not too distant future, it will look for all the world as if the Jews are NOT God’s people!

I know. God made an unconditional covenant with Israel way back in the days of Abraham. What Hosea is promising God will do to Israel appears to violate that covenant. But it doesn’t. Not really.

And it doesn’t because the punishment coming Israel’s way is to be temporary. As awful as the judgment will be, God’s final word to His people is not judgment, but grace.

Grace is the thought behind the final verses of the first chapter.

### **The Final Triumph of Grace (1:10--2:1)**

*[10] Yet the number of the sons of Israel  
Will be like the sand of the sea,  
Which cannot be measured or numbered;  
And it will come about that, in the place  
Where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’  
It will be said to them, ‘You are the sons of the living God.’  
[11] And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered  
together,  
And they will appoint for themselves one leader,  
And they will go up from the land,  
For great will be the day of Jezreel.  
Say to your brothers, ‘Ammi,’ (My people) and to your sisters,  
‘Ruhamah.’ (compassion)*

Wonderful! In the end, there will be a national restoration and national blessing. But, as the rest of the book of Hosea makes clear, it will be a long and winding road from apostasy to blessing for Israel!

## **Israel’s Wandering Ways**

### **Overview: Adultery as a Picture of Sin**

People who aren’t familiar with the Bible may assume that it is a somewhat bland, innocuous, tame, even G-rated book. It’s not.

Now I don’t want anyone to read the Bible, or Hosea in particular, because of its graphic language. But, it should be no secret that if we were rating it, Hosea would rate an R.

Sexual imagery abounds in this book, as it does in many of the prophets. And there is a reason for that.

On the one hand, the sins people commit in this and every age are often sexual sins. These sins need to be named - adultery, fornication, use of pornography, homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> Hosea names the sexual sins of his day.

But the sexual images are included, too, because of the marriage imagery I mentioned a minute ago. God has entered into a sacred covenant relationship with His people. Intimacy (of a spiritual nature) with His people is His passion.

And when Israel, or when we, His people today, seek ultimate fulfillment in other people, or in things, or in activities - and not in Him, God considers that adulterous.

We would all agree that ADULTERY IS SIN. The message of Hosea is that SIN IS ADULTERY.

Hosea, speaking for God, urges Israel to behave consistent with who she is - God’s holy bride, instead of as an unfaithful wife.

His rebukes touch on the various kinds of sinfulnesses that the Jews were committing. Chief among them was idolatry. According to Hosea, idolatry is adultery.

<sup>14</sup> [8] *When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son.*  
[9] *And the Lord said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.”*

<sup>15</sup> These, as well as pedophilia, incest, and bestiality are all named in the Bible.

## The Adultery of IDOLATRY (4:12-14)

Idolatry is actually many things - including STUPID! Over and over again, the Bible highlights the stupidity of idolatry.<sup>16</sup>

But even more, Hosea emphasizes the adulterous ugliness of God's people giving themselves to other gods.

Listen to a particularly stern rebuke for idolatry in Hosea's fourth chapter.

***[4:12] My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner's wand informs them;  
FOR A SPIRIT OF HARLOTRY HAS LED THEM ASTRAY,  
AND THEY HAVE PLAYED THE HARLOT, DEPARTING FROM  
THEIR GOD.***<sup>17</sup>

In Hosea's day, several kinds of false worship were prevalent.

- There was calf worship<sup>18</sup>.
- There was the worship of Molech, which involved child sacrifice.
- There was Baal worship, a Canaanite worship of nature and the spirits which were thought to inhabit nature.
- There was also the worship of the Queen of Heaven, a form of worship introduced by Jezebel, the wicked wife of King Ahab.

God, the Husband of the people of God, saw the Jews' penchant for worshipping other gods as a slap in His face along the lines of a wife looking for sexual fulfillment outside of marriage.

Idolatry is adulterous. So are other kinds of sinful behavior.

<sup>16</sup> See Isaiah 44 for one of the best examples of sarcasm in the Bible as Isaiah makes fun of those who worship idols.

<sup>17</sup> See also chapter 2:2-8, and chapter 13 for two of the more notable rebukes for idolatry in the book.

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps a throwback to the time when Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship in the wilderness while Moses was getting the Ten Commandments from God, Exodus 32. Hosea 10:5 describes Israel as the people of the calf.

## The Adultery of IMMORALITY (4:1-6)

***[4:1] Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel,  
For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land,  
Because there is NO FAITHFULNESS or KINDNESS  
or KNOWLEDGE OF GOD in the land.***

***[2] There is SWEARING, DECEPTION, MURDER, STEALING, and  
ADULTERY.***

***They employ VIOLENCE, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.***

***[6] My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.***

***Because you have rejected knowledge,***

***I also will reject you from being My priest.***

***Since you have FORGOTTEN THE LAW OF YOUR GOD,***

***I also will forget your children.***

The people of God in Hosea's day strayed far from God's Law. God saw that straying as adulterous.

In recent days, I've had opportunity to think a lot about marriage vows. I officiated at a marriage recently for a couple who don't attend our church. And then, in a little more than a week, I'll officiate the wedding of Elizabeth Godsey and her fiancé, Mike Guffrey. I've got the marriage vows right at the forefront of my mind.

At a wedding, couples make sacred promises to each other to behave in certain ways.

Love, honor, lead, follow, cherish, forsake all others, leave and cleave. These are the promises husbands and wives make at the wedding altar.

If you're married, you've made these solemn promises to your husband or to your wife. If you are not married, but hope to be some day, these are the promises you will make. They are not light and airy promises. They are weighty and they are to be taken seriously.

Israel and God had entered into a covenant relationship. He promised to provide certain things for her. She, too, made certain promises, all contained in the Law.

Hosea looks at the nation's behavior and sees a wife not living up to her end of the bargain. Her every immoral act was a walk away from her husband.

Every lie, every murder, every theft, every broken promise, every act of violence, every drunkenness, every sexual sin that any Israelite (man or woman) committed was adulterous.

The picture is of a courtroom scene in which God brings a case against His people. Imagine Him filing for divorce. These are His complaints against His spouse. She has been unfaithful. He is strong, but He is heartbroken - and He is not going to take it anymore!

There is at least one more very helpful image in Hosea. Not only are His people adulterous because of their *idolatry* and *immorality*. God sees Israel's *disloyalty* as an act of adultery.

### **The Adultery of DISLOYALTY**

***[6:4]What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?  
What shall I do with you, O Judah?<sup>19</sup>  
For your loyalty<sup>20</sup> is like a morning cloud,  
And like the dew which goes away early.***

“Loyalty” is one of the greatest themes of the Old Testament. It is a concept usually reserved to describe God's commitment to His people, and described by the Hebrew word “chesed.”

*Chesed* is God's rubber-meets-the-road pledge to always keep His promises to Israel. Chesed is loyal love. He is hers. He pledges His strengths to meet her needs. Period.

Israel? Well, she is not all that committed to an exclusive relationship. She likes to date around. What does that mean?

<sup>19</sup> Can you hear the divine frustration with the people of Israel in these questions?

<sup>20</sup> Usually reserved for God's posture toward Israel, the word used here of Israel's loyalty, is *chesed*.

In practical terms, it meant that rather than depend on her Husband - God - to protect and provide for her, Israel depended for her survival on other nations - like Assyria!

***[5:13] When Ephraim saw his sickness,  
And Judah his wound,  
Then Ephraim went to Assyria  
And sent to King Jareb.  
But he is unable to heal you,  
Or to cure you of your wound.***

This verse refers to an actual historical event. The Jews began to decline - economically, politically, militarily. There were in trouble.

But, did they turn to God for help? NO! They went for help to Assyria. Talk about disloyalty! God considered that disloyalty adulterous. And talk about poetic justice. God allowed the Assyrians to be the ones who eventually conquered Israel.

Now, let's take this “sin=adultery” idea and apply it to our own lives and situations, today.

### **APPLYING “SIN = ADULTERY”**

Have you ever thought about your sins as an offense against God? Have you ever thought of your misbehavior as a violation of a covenant relationship between you and God?

Hosea says that seeking fulfillment in life through false gods is adulterous. Have you substituted some other person, some possession, or some activity for the place of God in your life?

Are you currently violating clearly expressed commands from God? If you are involved in a sexual relationship with someone to whom you are not married, God considers that relationship adulterous - against Him, because it is a violation of His will.

Your loose, gossiping tongue is adulterous, as is your Internet surfing for porn or other destructive uses of the World Wide Web, as is your coldness toward your spouse or your kids, as is your disrespect of your parents.

And then, to whom or to what do you turn when you are in trouble or when you face a stressful challenge? Are you banking on the United States economy to pull you through? How about the US military? Are you relying on someone or something other than God?

Hosea invites us to ask the hard questions. He's good at getting us to ask the hard questions. He's also quite skilled at providing compelling answers.

And, at the mid-way mark in his book, he stops and points the way for you and me to travel if we find ourselves guilty of an Israel-like adultery.

First, He assures us that we can return to our God/Husband, confident that He will receive us.

### **The Call to Repentance! (6:1-3)**

*[1] Come, let us return to the LORD.*

*For He has torn us, but He will heal us;*

*He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.*

*[2] He will revive us after two days;*

*He will raise us up on the third day*

*That we may live before Him.*

*[3] So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD.*

*His going forth is as certain as the dawn;*

*And He will come to us like the rain,*

*Like the spring rain watering the earth.*

What is true about God's dealings with the Jews of ancient Israel is also true about His dealings with you, His child, this morning.

If you return to Him, He will certainly receive you. No matter how far you have strayed. No matter what you have done. No matter what sin you have committed.

He will heal you in your torn places. He will bandage your woundedness. He will revive you and raise you up.

Hosea will have more to say about what returning (also called "repentance") looks like, but this is a promise. Return to Him as He tells you to return and you will find a gracious, compassionate, loving God.

And if you or I don't return? If we choose to continue on a path of rebellion? God will not leave us alone. He is more than willing to keep the pressure on and "tighten the screws" to bring us to that point of returning.

Just as any loving parent is willing to inflict discipline to train a child, so God's willingness to bring suffering on Israel and on us does not mean that He DOES NOT love us. It means that He DOES love us!

For those who would doubt God's love, Hosea recounts evidence of His love for Israel.

### **God's Willingness to Discipline for Rebellion and Wandering**

#### **God's Heart for His Wandering People**

*History proves His love (11:1-5)*

*[11:1] When Israel was a youth I loved him,  
And out of Egypt I called My son.*

*[2] The more they called them,  
The more they went from them;  
They kept sacrificing to the Baals  
And burning incense to idols.*

*[3] Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them in My arms;*

*But they did not know that I healed them.*

*[4] I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,  
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;  
And I bent down and fed them.*

Here, Hosea recounts God's redemption of Israel from Egypt. He recalls all of the scrapes Israel got into, and how He rescued her out of them all. He taught Israel how to walk, healed her when she was sick, nurtured her, fed her.

God wants His people to remember how GOOD He has been to them!

And as we consider these goodnesses of God to Israel, you're probably already thinking about how He has shown His goodness to you, in Jesus.

A crucified Savior, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the family of God, answered prayer - and on and on and on and on! He has indeed been exceedingly good to us!

But back to Hosea. God goes on to recount her many idolatries. Yet despite the fact that she strayed from Him (as Gomer did to Hosea), God never stopped loving her.

*God's sorrow at Israel's straying (11:8)*

***[11:8] 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.***

What passion there is in those words! God cannot bring Himself to treat Israel as He has treated other sinful peoples. He mentions two nations - Admah and Zeboiim.

Who, today, has ever heard of Admah or Zeboiim? Exactly! Nobody has heard of them because God completely destroyed them when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

But, God will NOT utterly destroy Israel! He sees a day when Israel will walk with Him.

No matter what discipline He has to employ, even if He has to use a surgeon's knife, even if He has to draw blood, He will bring her to the point of repentance.

To get her attention, God is willing to remove her political and spiritual leadership.

## **The Discipline God Promises**

*He will remove political and religious leadership (3:4-5)*

***[3:4] For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. [5] Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.***

God's hope is that a barrenness of wise and godly leaders will prompt Israel to return to the LORD. But if that fails, He's willing to bring about military destruction.

*He will bring military destruction (7:13)*

***[7:13] Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me!  
Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me!  
I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me.  
[11:6] And the sword will whirl against their cities,  
And will demolish their gate bars  
and consume them because of their counsels.***

When God's people are insensitive to the Word, God will use the sword. This is no idle threat. He will bring the Assyrians to Israel to teach her a lesson.

And, if that doesn't work, He will orchestrate an exile to wake her up.

*He will have them taken away into exile (9:1-3)<sup>21</sup>*

***[9:1] Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!  
For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.  
You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor.  
[2] Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them,  
And the new wine will fail them.***

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 9 is full of God's rebukes, and of the features of the coming judgment, specifically: the death of joy (v. 1-2); exile from their land (vv. 3-6); the loss of spiritual discernment (vv. 7-9); a declining birth rate (vv. 10-16); exile (v. 17)

***[3] They will not remain in the LORD'S land,  
But Ephraim will return to Egypt,  
And in Assyria they will eat unclean food.***

There would have been nothing more terrifying to a Jew of Hosea's day than the threat of being carried away from the land of Palestine. All the promises of God related to the nation being IN THE LAND.

Yet, even this most severe discipline would be orchestrated if that was what it took to turn Israel back to God.

And, in fact, that is exactly what happened not long after Hosea wrote. Assyria militarily defeated Israel and then carried much of the population off to exile.

### **No Future in Resisting God**

One of the major purposes of Hosea is to assure us that there is no future in resisting God. There was not in the days of Hosea and there is no future in it today, either.

If you are His (that is, if you have placed your trust in Christ for salvation), then He will reliably work in your life to conform you to the image of His Son, Jesus.

When He sees rebellion, He will bring discipline.

Today, God is willing to bring discipline as severe as anything we read about in the book of Hosea.

- It can take the form of some physical disease or suffering (Although not that all physical maladies are God's discipline).
- It can take the form of an emotional downswing (Although not all emotional dips are God's discipline).
- It can take the form of a career crash, a financial reversal, a relational earthquake, or even a national catastrophe. (Not that any of these things are necessarily God's discipline - BUT He can certainly use any and all of them to get our attention!)

Of one thing we can be certain. God will not leave us alone to wallow in our rebellion, apathy, or spiritual adultery. He will be proactive in driving us to see our need to return to Him.

So, suppose you are, right now, at the point of saying, "*I want to return. I'm tired of running away from this God who so desperately loves me. I want to return to Him. But, I don't know what to do!*"?

If those, or something similar, are your thoughts, GREAT!

Hosea anticipated that you would be ready and eager to return to God after reading his book. And he ends with what I think is the best description in the entire Bible of what it means for God's child to return to Him.

Listen as Hosea urges us to Picture Perfect Repentance.

### **Conclusion: Picture Perfect Repentance (14:1-3)**<sup>22</sup>

#### **ABOUT FACE**

***[14:1] Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,  
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.***

#### **SPEAK HONEST WORDS**

***[2] Take words with you and return to the LORD.***

There must be more than a general commitment to change. We must have some idea of what we are repenting of and we must speak. Take words of confession, specific, not vague. Take words of resolve. Take words of worship. Take words like those that follow...

#### **ASK FOR CLEANSING**

***Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity,***

God is willing to forgive. We can and should go to Him in that confidence. But we must also be willing to ask for that cleansing.

<sup>22</sup> Many thanks to Dr. Larry Crabb for his insights into the process of repentance from this passage found in Inside Out, NavPress, 1988.

**WORSHIP HIM!**

*And receive us graciously,  
That we may present the fruit of our lips.*

The point of our repentance must not be that we would somehow feel better, but that we would be able to worship better.

**EXPRESS DEPENDENCE**

*[3] Assyria will not save us,  
We will not ride on horses;*

Israel was threatened with national collapse. The country was weak and vulnerable. They were tempted to look to whatever resources might work to protect them. A pact with Assyria combined with their own military might could conceivably win the day. When coming to God, we must admit that nothing will protect us except God Himself. And, if He fails to come through, we're sunk.

**BREAK WITH SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

*Nor will we say again, 'Our god,'  
To the work of our hands;*

This is the core of repentance. We must come to a clear and decisive break with self-sufficiency.

**ADMIT VULNERABILITY**

*For in Thee the orphan finds mercy.*

Fatherless children are unprotected, vulnerable to the point of helplessness. Repentance leads us into an experience of our disappointment and aloneness that crushes.

If today, you have realized that you have strayed (and become "adulterous" against God), He invites you to **REPENT**. On the other side of that repentance, you will find the tender mercies of a God who desperately loves you.