

Hosea Chapter 11

Verses 1-11

This chapter unfolds both the anger and the compassion of God as (God's), commitment and (Israel's), contempt meet head-on.

It would be difficult to understand such a rebellious response to such a perfect love, except that we today are so much like Israel.

Verses 1-8

"I ... called my son out of Egypt:"

These words are quoted by Matthew and applied to Jesus (Matt. 2:15).

Israel and Jesus were alike in the both were the objects of the love of the Father, both were called "my son," and both were in Egypt.

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel [was] a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

In tender words reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt (compare Exodus 4:22-23), the LORD reassured Israel of His intense love for her.

His compassion for her was aroused (compare Isa. 12:1; 40:1-2; 49:13; Jer. 31:10-14; Zech. 1:12-17; see Matthew 2:15 for Matthew's analogical use of this verse in relationship to Jesus Christ).

Israel was known as the family of Jacob for their stay in Egypt.

They became known as the nation of Israel on their journey to the Promised Land.

God had seen them in their destitute condition, and He had mercy upon them.

God took them for His family, and brought them out of Egypt.

God redeemed them from heavy bondage in Egypt, and declared them to be His son.

God loved them above all other nations.

Hosea 11:2 "[As] they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images."

That is, the prophets of the LORD, the true prophets, called Israel to the worship and service of God.

But they turned a deaf ear to them, and their backs upon them.

And the more they called to them, the further they went from them, and from the way of their duty (see Hosea 11:7).

“So they”:

Israelites, called and entreated, especially they of that age when the division was made, and ever since.

“Went from”:

Contrarily and most disingenuously apostatized more and more, as the prophet, (Isaiah 1:5).

Horrible ingratitude so to requite God!

“From them”:

From the prophets’ counsel and commands, delivered as they came from God.

“They sacrificed unto Baalim”:

In the desert they began this apostasy, joined themselves to Baal-peor (Num. 25:3), and worshipped the calf (Exodus 32:4-6), and held on with obstinacy in it.

“Graven images”:

Images of their gods, before which they performed another part of religious worship, burning incense before them.

It seemed, that even from the beginning, they would fall away and worship false gods.

God would forgive them, and start them again on the right path.

It seemed, they could not handle good times.

Each time they would fall away to worship other gods.

It is a possibility that they began practicing the worship of false gods in Egypt, and never completely got rid of those bad habits.

They were unfaithful from the beginning.

Verses 3-4: The LORD's endearing word pictures are reflected in Ezekiel's touching descriptions of Israel's early years (compare Ezek. chapter 16).

Hosea 11:3 "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them."

I directed the feet of Ephraim.

In this time of Ephraim's childhood, I supported and directed his steps, as a mother or nurse those of a child whom she is teaching to walk.

"Taking them by their arms":

To guide them that they might not stray from the right way; and to hold them up, that they might not stumble and fall (see notes on Deut. 1:31; 32:11-12; Isaiah chapter 63).

Thus did God deal with Israel in the wilderness; and thus he directs and supports the steps of his spiritual Israel, amidst all their difficulties and dangers.

"But they knew not that I healed them":

They did not acknowledge this or my care over them and kindness to them.

Ephraim had received the spiritual blessing of the right hand.

God had gone to extra trouble to teach Ephraim His ways.

Part of the reason for the 40 years of wandering, was to teach them His ways.

God healed their unfaithfulness over and over.

God forgave them, and gave them another chance.

He tried to lead them and guide them, but they did not learn their lesson well.

God acted as a loving parent.

Hosea 11:4 "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them."

"I drew them with the cords of a man":

"Wanton heifers such as was Israel, are drawn with ropes; but although Ephraim struggled against Me, I would not draw him as a beast, but I drew him as a man, (not a servant, but a son), with cords of love."

"Love is the magnet of love.":

"The first and chief commandment of the law is not of fear, but of love, because He willed those whom He commanded, to be sons rather than servants."

"I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws":

As a careful husbandman doth in due season take the yoke from his laboring oxen, and takes off the muzzle with which they were kept from eating when at work, gives them time of rest and feeding: so did God with Israel.

"I laid meat unto them":

Brought them provision in their wants, as the careful husbandman brings fodder and provender for his wearied laboring oxen.

By which plain simile God doth inform Israel in Hosea's time what ancient, tender, constant, and vigilant love he had showed to Israel, to their predecessors, and to them also.

And hereby discovers their unheard-of ingratitude and wickedness, which began in their fathers, and hath continued with increase to the days of their final ruin.

These "cords of a man" mean that God had a hold on their guidance.

God kept them close enough, that they could not completely wander away.

All of this control that God kept over them was done in love.

We see that even though God had controls on Ephraim, He still lifted the yoke, so that it would not be too heavy to bear.

Matthew 11:30 "For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light."

Notice, "I laid meat unto them".

He blessed them with plenty to eat.

God provided all their needs.

Verses 5-7

In spite of His tender care, Israel was ungrateful, demanding punishment (Romans 1:21).

Hosea 11:5 "He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return."

“Shall not return ... Egypt”

See note on 8:13.

We see that God has finally had enough of their unfaithfulness.

God has stopped protecting them.

They will not go back into Egypt where He found them, but their captivity will be even worse in Assyria.

They refused to repent and return to God, so God has given them over to be punished.

Hosea 11:6 "And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour [them], because of their own counsels."

“And the sword shall abide on his cities”:

Literally, "shall light, shall whirl" down upon.

It shall come with violence upon them as a thing whirled with force, and then it shall alight and abide, to their destruction.

As Jeremiah says, "a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, a grievous whirlwind; it shall fall grievously (literally, whirl down) on the head of the wicked" (Jer. 23:19).

And shall consume his branches”:

That is, his mighty men and lesser towns and villages.

It is all one, whether the mighty men are so called, by metaphor, from the "branches" of a tree, or from the "bars" of a city, made out of those branches.

Their mighty men, so far from escaping for their might, should be the first to perish.

“Devour them”:

Swallow them up with speed and ease, without remedy.

“Because of their own counsels”:

Which they first took (1 Kings 12:28), and ever since irreclaimably have followed, in opposition to all the good counsels the prophets gave them from time to time.

To all which they have turned a deaf ear; they have sued for Egypt and Ashur's favor, and slighted mine.

This is speaking of the invasion that comes.

This will be bloody.

All the cities will be joined in this battle.

The sword will be in all the cities.

They had taken counsel from the world, instead of from God.

The "consuming of the branches" would be all their young men falling in battle.

Hosea 11:7 "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt [him]."

"Bent to backsliding":

Not only do they backslide, and that too from Me, their "chief good," but they are bent upon it.

"Though they":

The prophets, called them to the Most High; invited, exhorted, and encouraged them with many fair promises to give glory to God by returning.

To exalt God, they must cease to be "bent on backsliding," and must lift themselves upwards.

"None at all":

Not one of many, scarce any one in those great numbers in Israel, would hearken and obey.

Would exalt him; God in his holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, all which a repenting people do magnify, but these will not.

They retain their idols, depend on Egypt, and put all on that cast, and will neither believe nor try God's goodness.

"Backsliding":

See note on Prov. 14:14.

They had been in right standing with God, and they of their own free will, have turned away from God.

They are like many people today who walk with God for a while, and then the cares of this world cause them to fall away.

God had called them to a special relationship with Him.

They, of their own free will, refused to exalt Him as God.

Verses 8-9

Because God is “not man,” He does not act as a human would, in blind, unbridled vengeance.

Rather, God expresses a moving wave of poignant love reminiscent of Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus’ unshakable devotion to the city that rejected Him is consistent with the heart of His Father, a heart filled with compassion for the rebellious nation of Israel.

Hosea 11:8 "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? [how] shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? [how] shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

The wicked cities of “Admah” and “Zeboim” were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25; Deut. 29:23).

The word "Admah" means earthy.

"Zeboim" means gazelles.

They were like wild animals, which were difficult to tame.

God obviously loved Ephraim and Israel.

He was like a loving parent that kept going back and forgiving them.

They deserve to be totally destroyed, but God cannot bring Himself to do that.

His heart is still upon them.

God, even now, repents of the terrible punishment He had planned for them.

Instead of total destruction, they are scattered.

God never completely gives up on them.

In the time of Jesus, He reaches out to them again.

John 11:54 "Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples."

Verses 9-11

"I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger:"

Though His judgment against Israel will be severe, it will not obliterate them.

God will keep His covenant with Israel, which necessitates the continued existence of the nation into the Millennium, when the Messiah will rule and reign over a converted nation for a thousand years.

Hosea 11:9 "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I [am] God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city."

"I will not return to destroy Ephraim":

The destruction referred to that inflicted by Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser, who deprived Israel of Gilead, Galilee, and Naphtali (2 Kings 15:29).

Ultimately, it referred to the promise that after the long dispersion God would, in mercy, restore His people in the kingdom, never to be destroyed again.

God is not man, that He has to explain why He forgives someone.

God never pours out His wrath upon His own.

He loves them and will make a way out for them.

He will not completely destroy Ephraim.

He will leave a door open in this situation.

They will have opportunity to accept Jesus as their Savior, when God pours out His mercy on mankind.

God never stops loving, and that is why He sent His Son to save whosoever will.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Verses 10-11

Here, Hosea uses the images of the "lion" and the "dove" in a positive light (compare to 5:14 and 7:11).

The LORD's lion like "roar" will someday call His exiled people home, and they will, like swift birds, return to their land.

Hosea 11:10 "They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west."

"Shall roar like a lion":

Though the LORD would, as a lion, roar against Israel in judgment (Amos 1:2), He would also roar for the purpose of calling, protecting, and blessing (Joel 3:16).

"From the west":

Returnees from Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were from the east.

This undoubtedly has reference to His return at the Second Advent to set up the millennial kingdom (Isa. 11:11-12), when He calls Israel from their worldwide dispersion and reverses the judgment (of 9:17).

The lion is a mighty powerful animal that sounds fearful when it roars.

The fear of the LORD causes them to tremble.

Ephraim will return to the LORD, and walk in His ways.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

Hosea 11:11 "They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD."

The West denoted Europe; Egypt and Assyria stand, each for all the lands beyond them, and so for Africa and Asia; all together comprise the three quarters of the world, from where converts have chiefly come to Christ.

These are likened to birds, chiefly for the swiftness with which they shall then haste to the call of God, who now turned away the more, the more they were called.

The dove, especially, was a bird of Palestine, proverbial for the swiftness of its flight.

Easily frightened, and flying the more rapidly, the more it was frightened, and returning to its cot from any distance where it might be carried.

From where Isaiah also says of the converts, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" (Isaiah 60:8).

“And I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD”:

It is not said in towns and cities, and fortified places, but in houses, signifying that they should dwell in their own land, in a civil sense, securely, and in their habitations.

Under their vines and fig trees, being in no fear and danger of enemies, and live in the utmost safety, under the government and protection of the King Messiah.

Or, in a spiritual sense, they will be placed in the congregations of the saints in the churches of Christ, which will be as dove houses to them.

This is speaking of a time, when they will be eager to return to their home, as a bird is eager to return to his nest.

This speaks of a time when they will return home, and receive their houses again.

Verses 11:12 – 12:2

Unlike “Ephraim” (the northern kingdom), “Judah” (the southern kingdom), had a few kings and priests who continued to honor God.

Yet Hosea often spoke direct warnings to Judah” (4:14-15; 10:11; 12:1-2).

Hosea 11:12 "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints."

Play the hypocrites with me still; yet give me good words, call themselves my people, and say I am their God and that they worship me and seek me; but they flatter me with their mouths, and lie unto me with their tongues (as Psalm 78:36).

So, God upbraids them with this, their sin.

“And the house of Israel with deceit”:

The same thing in a reiterated phrase, to affect and comprehend the more.

“Judah”:

The people of the two tribes, under the government of the house of David.

“Ruleth with God”:

While idolaters are vassals and slaves to the devil and to their own superstitious fears, the true worshippers of God, like princes, rule with God.

Or rather, keeping to the house of David, retained the government in Theopolitia (a government set up of God): when Ephraim made kings and princes, but God did not know it, i.e. did not advise nor approve it.

“And is faithful with the saints”:

Retains also purity, at least truth, of worship, and in the holy things of God keeping to his word, and comparatively is faithful: whereas Ephraim is hypocritical and false, Judah adheres to God’s holy prophets, priests, and other saints of God.

Even though God will restore them, He still speaks of their unfaithfulness to Him.

They are full of lies and deceit.

Judah is the tribe that the Lord Jesus comes from.

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Jesus rules with God the Father.

He rules all the world from Jerusalem in the land of Judah.

Hosea Chapter 11 Questions

1. What does God call Israel in verse 1?
2. While they were in Egypt, they were spoken of as the family of _____.
3. What terrible things did they do in return?
4. What, possibly, was the cause of their false worship?
5. _____ had received the spiritual blessing of the right hand.
6. What was part of the reason they wandered 40 years in the wilderness?

7. God acted as a loving _____ toward them.
8. What did "the cords of a man" indicate?
9. What does "I laid meat unto them" mean?
10. Who will rule over them?
11. They had taken counsel of the _____.
12. What was the "consuming of the branches"?
13. What is meant by "backsliding"?
14. What had they done of their own free will?
15. What does the word "Admah" mean?
16. "Zeboim" means what?
17. In verse 8, what does God do that gives them a glimmer of hope?
18. Does God have to explain why He forgives someone?
19. They shall walk after the LORD, he shall roar like a _____.
20. What happens to Ephraim?
21. They tremble as a _____ out of Egypt.
22. What does God speak of, again, in verse 12?