

May 31 Lesson 14 (NIV)

PURSUE LOVE AND JUSTICE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 8:11–20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hosea 11; 12

HOSEA 11:1, 2, 7–10

¹ “When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

² But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.”

.....
⁷ “My people are determined to turn from me.
Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.

⁸ “How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?

My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.

⁹ I will not carry out my fierce anger,
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.

For I am God, and not a man—
the Holy One among you.
I will not come against their cities.

¹⁰ They will follow the LORD;
he will roar like a lion.

When he roars,
his children will come trembling from the west.”

HOSEA 12:1, 2, 6–14

¹ Ephraim feeds on the wind;
he pursues the east wind all day
and multiplies lies and violence.

He makes a treaty with Assyria

and sends olive oil to Egypt.

²The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah;
he will punish Jacob according to his ways
and repay him according to his deeds.

.....
⁶But you must return to your God;
maintain love and justice,
and wait for your God always.

⁷The merchant uses dishonest scales
and loves to defraud.

⁸Ephraim boasts,
“I am very rich; I have become wealthy.
With all my wealth they will not find in me
any iniquity or sin.”

⁹“I have been the LORD your God
ever since you came out of Egypt;
I will make you live in tents again,
as in the days of your appointed festivals.

¹⁰I spoke to the prophets,
gave them many visions
and told parables through them.”

¹¹Is Gilead wicked?
Its people are worthless!
Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal?
Their altars will be like piles of stones
on a plowed field.

¹²Jacob fled to the country of Aram;
Israel served to get a wife,
and to pay for her he tended sheep.

¹³The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt,
by a prophet he cared for him.

¹⁴But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger;
his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed
and will repay him for his contempt.

KEY VERSE

*You must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. —
Hosea 12:6*

JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

Unit 3: Called to God’s Work of Justice

LESSONS 10–14

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify Israel's problem.
2. Explain whether the predicted consequences of that problem better fit the concept of *restorative* justice or that of *retributive* justice.
3. Identify one or more modern parallels to elements of the text and develop responses.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Rotten at the Core
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Father's Faithfulness (HOSEA 11:1, 2, 7–10)
 - A. God's Action (v. 1)
 - B. Israel's Reaction (vv. 2, 7)
Judgment Tempered by Love
 - C. God's Decision (vv. 8, 9)
 - D. Israel's Future (v. 10)
- II. Lord's Resolution (HOSEA 12:1, 2, 6–14)
 - A. Charges of Sin (vv. 1, 2)
 - B. Direction for a Return (v. 6)
 - C. Persistence in Wickedness (vv. 7, 8)
 - D. Plan for Reconciliation (vv. 9, 10)
 - E. Resistance to the Plan (vv. 11–14)

Conclusion

- A. Fruit for the Harvest
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Admah*Ad*-muh.

Baal*Bay*-ul.

Ephraim*Ee*-fray-im.

Gilead*Gil*-ee-ud (*G* as in *get*).

Gilgal*Gil*-gal (*G* as in *get*).

Zeboyim*Zeh*-bo-im.

Introduction

A. Rotten at the Core

One hot summer day, the cool green watermelon was as appealing as gourmet ice cream. A swift stroke of a knife later, though, and everyone gathered around the table winced in disgust. The watermelon had rotted from the inside out. The rind was perfect, but the dead white insides reeked of decay. Disappointment quickly gave way to revulsion as we tried to escape the nauseating stench. The beautiful fruit was rotten at the core.

The northern kingdom of Israel of the mid-eighth century BC looked beautiful on the surface as well, like the nation had it all together. But it too was rotten at the core. And God had had enough of Israel's revolting behavior.

B. Lesson Context

A general time line for Hosea's prophetic ministry is 755–725 BC. This is computed with reference to the reigns listed in Hosea 1:1, as well as the fact that the northern kingdom of Israel, Hosea's primary focus, ceased to exist in 722 BC.

Israel's King Jeroboam II, listed in Hosea 1:1, reigned from about 793 to 753 BC. He was a strong ruler politically. He expanded Israel's borders and made Israel the leading nation in Palestine and Syria (see 2 Kings 14:23–29). Israel was wealthy and proud of its success. Turning their backs on God, the people also found it all too easy to shift allegiance to the fictitious deity known as Baal (Hosea 2:8, 13); this went hand in hand with injustice (4:1, 2). In confronting this idolatry, God called Hosea to live out a unique and difficult parable of God's love for Israel (see chap. 1–3).

Hosea's style did not involve pronouncing what we might call highly directed prophecies—those beginning with the command “Hear,” followed by named addressees—the way other prophets did (contrast Jeremiah 10:1; 22:2, last week's lesson; etc.). Two exceptions are found in Hosea 4:1 and 5:1. Following those pronouncements, Hosea simply continued his generalized prophetic pronouncements on wayward Israel. For this reason, the organization of the book can be difficult to determine.

I. Father's Faithfulness

(HOSEA 11:1, 2, 7–10)

A. God's Action (v. 1)

1. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Hosea tells the story of God's interactions with *Israel* beginning with the exodus *out of Egypt*. That event and the giving of the law at Sinai launched Israel as a nation. Calling Israel *a child* reinforces that this was a formative experience (compare Jeremiah 2:2). God is determined that the leadership and people of Israel understand the coming prophecy first and foremost in terms of his love.

Matthew uses this text to describe the return of young Jesus from Egypt (Matthew 2:15). That story too should be read in light of God's love. Jesus is the ultimate expression of that love.

B. Israel's Reaction (vv. 2, 7)

2. “But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.”

The designation *Baal* refers to the fictitious god of other nations, particularly the Canaanites. This is a term that generally has the sense of “lord” or “master.” But no matter how persistently God has *called* Israel to him, the people insist on doing the opposite and embracing idolatry (examples: 2 Kings 17:15, 16; Hosea 11:7, below; 13:1).

Though the people may still be offering sacrifices to the Lord and celebrating his festivals (Hosea 2:11), they also burn *incense* to idols (compare Jeremiah 1:16; 18:15; Hosea 2:13). The hearts of the people are untrue to the very God who gave birth to their nation by bringing them from Egypt and giving them a land of their own.

—C. R. B.

7a. “My people are determined to turn from me.

God’s frustration with the Israelites is quite apparent. Their choice is not accidental due to ignorance. Quite the opposite—theirs is a committed intent to *turn* away from him. The northern kingdom of Israel mirrors the southern kingdom of Judah in this regard (example: Jeremiah 8:5).

7b. “Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them.

The meaning of the Hebrew text is not entirely clear in this half verse. In the larger context of Hosea 11, it suggests that Israel is mixing practices and religious vocabulary. Likely the people are worshipping Canaanite deities even as they continue to say the right things about *God Most High*. Because of their utter refusal to abandon idolatry, God will not exalt them by delivering them.

C. God’s Decision (vv. 8, 9)

8. “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

The parallel structure of Hebrew poetry is evident here as the second question creatively rephrases the first. *Ephraim* is another way of referring to the northern kingdom of Israel (compare Hosea 5:3; 6:10; see also Genesis 41:50–52).

Likewise, the fourth question rephrases the third: *Admah* and *Zeboyim* were sister cities of the infamous Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:2, 8; Deuteronomy 29:23). The thought of punishing Israel as he did those cities breaks God’s *heart*. He is one who takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Language of *changed* and *aroused* does not mean that God repented of his actions as though he has done or is planning to do wrong. Rather, the sense is that *compassion* tempers his anger; see the next verse.

9. “I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.

This is not the first time that God’s compassion tempers his anger (see 2 Samuel 24:15–25). Unlike people prone to overreact in their anger, God is always thoughtful and measured in his actions.

For God to refer to himself as *the Holy One among you* reminds his covenant people that although he is present with them, he also is entirely different from them. His ways are not human ways (compare Numbers 23:19; Isaiah 55:8, 9).

This verse in its context is valuable for glimpsing God's two overarching characteristics of holiness (compare Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; etc.) and love (compare 1 John 4:8, 16). Neither one is subordinate to the other. God's holiness calls forth retributive expressions of his wrath (examples: Genesis 6:5–7; Revelation 20:15), while God's love calls forth restorative expressions of his wrath (Deuteronomy 8:5; Hebrews 12:5–7).

Centuries after the time of Hosea, the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross will satisfy the requirements of both God's holiness and love. As sin is punished to satisfy the requirements of God's holiness, the path to eternal life is thereby opened in satisfying the requirements of God's love. Life in the presence of our holy God becomes possible as sin's price is paid (Romans 3:21–26).

D. Israel's Future (v. 10)

10. “They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.”

They will follow the Lord will be the result of God's restorative discipline. The figurative *roar like a lion* by God will be the sign for Israel to return home. The return from exile by the southern kingdom of Judah will be from the east, but this return with *trembling from the west* is clarified as “from Egypt, trembling like sparrows” in Hosea 11:11 (not in today's text; compare and contrast Isaiah 11:11). This brings us full circle to the “out of Egypt” of Hosea 11:1, above. But Israel should realize that God can just as well act as a lion in a destructive sense (see Hosea 5:14).

II. Lord's Resolution

(HOSEA 12:1, 2, 6–14)

A. Charges of Sin (vv. 1, 2)

1. Ephraim feeds on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.

For *Ephraim* (meaning Israel; see on Hosea 11:8, above) to feed *on the wind* and pursue *the east wind* can be another way of referring to *a treaty with Assyria* and an economic treaty with *Egypt* that involves *olive oil* (see 2 Kings 17:4; 18:21; Isaiah 30:7). Rather than seeking God as an ally, the king of Israel has turned to world powers for security (compare Hosea 5:13; 7:11).

2. The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.

This is the formal language of a lawsuit (compare Isaiah 3:13; Amos 3:13; Micah 6:2). Like any legal arrangement, there are consequences for breaking the contract. These consequences are agreed on before signing (example: Deuteronomy 11:16, 17, 28). As the name Ephraim in our text refers to the entire northern kingdom of Israel, so also *Jacob* here represents all of *Judah* (or even both kingdoms in totality). Judah would do well to see how God judges the north and repent while there is time.

B. Direction for a Return (v. 6)

6. But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

The language of *return to your God* is language of repentance from sin. But this turn of the heart must be evidenced by a turn in behavior. Any turn of heart must be accompanied by exercising the *love and justice* that mirrors God's own character.

Further, to *wait for your God always* is not a suggestion of mere passive patience; rather, this imperative conveys the idea of an active and complete trust in God's plans and timing (examples: Psalm 130:5; Isaiah 8:17; Micah 7:7). This will demonstrate repentance from relying on earthly powers instead of the Lord.

C. Persistence in Wickedness (vv. 7, 8)

7. The merchant uses dishonest scales and loves to defraud.

The nation is portrayed as a greedy shopkeeper who gleefully uses *dishonest scales* (false weights on a balance scale) to *defraud*, or cheat, customers (compare Leviticus 19:36; Amos 8:5; Micah 6:10–14).

8. Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."

Ill-gotten gain breeds arrogance (compare Ezekiel 28:5). Unchecked arrogance eventually results in a self-deluding sense of invincibility (*they will not find in me any iniquity or sin*). Revelation 3:17 warns against the same self-delusion in the first century AD. This danger seems even greater today.

D. Plan for Reconciliation (vv. 9, 10)

9. "I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed festivals.

Mention of the exodus from *out of Egypt* again brings the prophecy back to Hosea 11:1. To *live in tents again* refers to the annual Festival of Tabernacles. During this week-long observance, Israelites live in temporary huts, or booths (tabernacles), to remember their days of God's protection in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33–36, 39–43). To bring the people back to him, God will send them through a wilderness experience again in the form of exile.

10. "I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them."

By this time, God has spoken *to the prophets* plainly (examples: Leviticus 26:14–17; 1 Kings 18:21; 20:13–22). He has also communicated through *visions* (examples: Numbers 24:4, 16; 1 Samuel 3:15) and *parables* (Psalm 78:2; Proverbs 1:1–6).

E. Resistance to the Plan (vv. 11–14)

11. Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field.

This is a good example of a prophetic parable in the form of a riddle God poses to Israel. Earlier in Hosea's prophecies, he had introduced *Gilgal* as the site of a major pagan shrine (Hosea 4:14, 15; compare Amos 4:4). Gilgal is west of the Jordan River and close to Jericho. The location of

the city of *Gilead* is unknown, but it parallels Gilgal in wickedness (see Hosea 6:8). God speaks of the people's pride in both the shrine and their agricultural wealth. But Gilead's *altars* to other gods make it as unfruitful as if its fields were sown with rocks instead of fertile soil.

12. Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep.

God continues the riddle by noting Jacob's experiences with Laban. Although *Jacob* initially *fled* to Laban for safety (Genesis 27:42–45), Jacob did not find the haven he hoped for. Jacob (later renamed *Israel*; 32:28) was deceived in marriage (29:14b–30) and ultimately sensed the need to flee (chap. 31). Similarly, Israel is looking to Egypt and Assyria for safety but will eventually find Egypt to be powerless and Assyria to be a deadly enemy.

13. The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.

God now speaks plainly again. Listening to Hosea is the same as listening to the *prophet* Moses of long ago. Both speak God's words. Just as God led *Israel up from* slavery under Moses, God can lead the Israelites away from a second captivity and exile if they listen to Hosea.

14. But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.

God repeats his warning: *Ephraim* (Israel) will face the consequences of its actions (compare Ezekiel 18:13). God's protection will be withdrawn. Arrogant Israel's injustice and idolatry will result in national destruction.

Conclusion

A. Fruit for the Harvest

All too frequently we feel the sneaky satisfaction of having gotten away with something. And our choices often convey to others that we are the most important people in our lives. We feel secure because of what we own or who we know; when trouble comes, we try to solve our own problems by way of people and stuff. Suddenly Israel looks as familiar as our reflection in the mirror.

It's time to leave those things behind and trust in God. It's time to show through our actions that we follow God only.

B. Prayer

Dear Lord, help us put hands and feet to our claims to follow you—and convict us when we don't. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let love and justice characterize your life.¹

¹