

A Loving Father and a Wayward Son

Hosea 11:1-14:9

These closing chapters (11-14) of Hosea echoⁱ the book's opening chapters (1-3) but with a change in metaphors. In chapters 1-3, Israel is portrayed as God's unfaithful wife, whom he would redeem in the latter days. In chapters 11-14, Israel is presented as God's wayward son, whom he would restore in time to come.

These themes are charged and engage, not just our minds, but our emotions as well. That's the design of the text. The metaphors are so close to us as humans that we can feel the deep pain of the abandoned husband and the father of the prodigal son.ⁱⁱ

These final chapters show us the longing heart of a loving father seeking to save his son, the calloused heart of a wayward son, and the way back to the family of God.

1. God's relentless love for his wayward son (11:1-11)

Like few other texts, chapter 11 shows us the heart of God for his people. These verses speak of God in human terms, not because He is like us, but because he is so unlike us. How can we ever begin to understand the intensity of infinite love that accomplishes its purpose? God made us to be people who feel deeply.

These verses show us the outworking of God love for his people past, present, and future.

A. Love's remembering—the past (11:1-4)

In verse 1, God recalls his love for Israel when he was a child, and he called his son out of Egypt. God's inexplicable love for his people made them his son and redeemed them from slavery. We can never forget the words that God spoke to Pharaoh through Moses: *you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me. If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son."*

The greatest thing that ever happened to Israel was that God loved them and gave them the status of sons (1).

God calling them was not just a one-time event (11:2).ⁱⁱⁱ He called them out of idolatry through his prophets. The more he called them, however, the more they went away.

Their defiance is set against God's tender care for them (3-4). He taught them to

walk, as if God is holding their hands as they tried to take steps. God cared for their hurts and illnesses. They were self-centered and unthankful.

In verse 4 the metaphor changes from caring for a child to caring for an animal: *he led them with cords of kindness (humanely) and bands of love*. He bent down and fed them.

These images show us divine compassion and grace, as God cared for his wayward son.

B. Rejecting love—the present (11:5-7)

The NK rejected God's tender care for them. He continually called them, but they refused to return to him (5b). As a result, they were going into exile in Assyria. Look carefully at the wording of the text. Their coming captivity is not so much due to their rebellion as it is due to their refusal to repent.

They were *bent on turning away from the LORD* (7a). Older versions translate this, *My people are bent on backsliding*.

The last half of verse 7 is a bit odd: *though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all*. They are calling out, but their repentance is not genuine (cf. 7:16). God's people are bent on backsliding, so he will not raise them up. He will not enable their sin.

As we have said so many times, believers are not characterized by not sinning but by repenting.

C. Restoring Love—the future (11:8-11)

The glory of God's grace is that he does not give up on us. God's love is relentless. Verse 8 has 3 pairs^{iv} of parallel lines. The first pair is the first 2 lines: *How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?* The meaning is clear. God will not let his people go.

The second pair of clauses shows the seriousness of the NK's sin: *How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?* These 2 towns^v are cities that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The third pair of lines illuminate the Sodom reference: *My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender*. The word *recoils* is the same word translated *overthrow* used in references to God's judgment of Sodom (Gen.

19:25,29; Deut. 29:23). For example;

Genesis 19:25 *And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.*^{vi}

Rather than treat his son like Sodom, God's anger was being *overthrown* by his *compassion* (cf. 13:14). God is described in human terms to help us begin to understand what it means for God to have mercy.

Lest we misunderstand the nature of God, Hosea clarifies in verse 9. God says, *I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again (sub, return) destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst and I will not come in wrath.*

When he identified himself as the *Holy One in your midst*, we expect, *therefore I will come in wrath*. God's eternal resolve is not to destroy his people but to save them.

What will he do? Verses 10-11 tell us that like a lion he will roar and his *sons* (ben) will come *trembling from the west, from Egypt, and from Assyria*.

How is it that God can call his disobedient son out of Egypt (11:1) and roar for his sons from every direction (10-11)? Both divine justice and love must be satisfied.

Verse 11:1 answers verses 9-11. God calling his Son out of Egypt has a fuller meaning.

In Matthew's Gospel, the fulfilment of Hosea 11:1, *out of Egypt I called my son*, is Jesus's return from Egypt after the death of Herod (cf Mt. 2:15). Herod was the spawn of Satan seeking to wreck God's plan of redemption.

Jesus, however, is the obedient Son the world had been looking for since the fall of Adam and the rebellion of Israel. God can call his wayward sons out Egypt and Assyria, and from the west, and every other direction because he put forward his righteous Son as a propitiation by his blood to be received through faith (cf. Rom 3:25-26).

God does not change. His love for us is not overwhelmed by our sinfulness. Therefore, he relentlessly pursues us in love.

God's love for his wayward sons will not fail, because God called his obedient Son out of Egypt and put him forward to redeem his wayward sons. In chapter 11, we

see the pursuing love of God—past, present, and future.

2. The calloused heart of God’s wayward son (11:12-13:16).

Chapters 12-13 take us into the valley of judgment. It is hard to move off the mountain peak of grace in chapter 11 to the valley of judgment in chapters 12-13.

The two primary, deal-breaking, covenant-breaking issues in the book of Hosea are taken up in these 2 chapters: scheming self-preservation inherent to foreign alliances (ch 12) and self-indulging idolatry of adopting the gods of the nations (ch 13).

Perhaps, we think, *so what! I’m not making alliances and bowing to idols*. Dear friend self-preserving schemes and sinful self-gratifying behavior are as common to us as ancient Israel.

A. God judges scheming self-preservation (11:12-12:14)

In chapter 12, the LORD brings his case^{vii} (cf. 12:2) against his people by laying their scheming actions right beside the deeds of their scheming ancestor Jacob.

Just as Jacob’s schemes betrayed a lack of trust in God, the self-preserving scheming of the NK moved them from trusting God to making deals with Assyria and counter-deals with Egypt (12:1; cf. 2Kgs 17:1-4).

Hosea compares and contrasts the scheming of the NK with their scheming ancestor Jacob. The difference between the two is Jacob repented. The NK would reap the full weight of their sin (12:2b, 14b).

1) A schemer who repented (2-6)

Jacob’s life illustrates a schemer who repented and found grace. Verses 3-4a give us a chiasm of Jacob’s life, where the first and last lines are related, and the middle two lines are related. In 3a, Jacob cheated his brother. In 4b, he is reconciled with this brother. Between those 2 events, Jacob had a life-changing encounter with God (3b, 4a).

A—In the womb he took his brother by the heel (12:3a)

B—and in his manhood (maturity, strength) he strove with God (12:4a)

B—He strove with the angel and prevailed (12:3b)

A—He wept and sought his favor (12:4b)

When Jacob was born, he was holding his brother's heel (12:3a). That is how he got his name, *Jacob*.^{viii} Jacob spent his life trying to scheme to get and hold what God would have given him (cf. Gen 25:21-23).

That same scheming, conniving spirit permeated the NK. They schemed and plotted to get what they simply could have trusted God for. Like Jacob, they schemed their way into a corner. They were vassal to Assyria but appealed to Egypt (12:1). That scheme led to their demise.

Between his birth and his reconciliation with Esau, Jacob had a transformative encounter with God.

The middle two lines (3b, 4a) describe the event: *in his manhood he strove with God and He strove with the angel and prevailed*. Jacob would never have been ready to meet Esau, unless he first met with God in a decisive way.

That encounter with God changed everything, even Jacob's name (cf. Gen 32:28).

Such an encounter is what the NK needed and what Hosea is calling for. This is why he brought up Bethel (4c-6). Bethel was Jacob's return to God.

He met God at Bethel twice: when he was on the run from Esau, and when he returned to Bethel.

In the first meeting, Jacob vowed that if God would bring him back, he would return to Bethel and worship God. After 20 years of serving Laban, God came calling: *Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau* (Gen 35:1; cf. 31:13). Then Jacob commanded his family, *Put away your gods, and let us arise and go to Bethel*.

Right here in the Hosea text is the Bethel call to Israel: *he met God at Bethel. And there God spoke with us* (4c,d). The Bethel call is for Israel *by God's help to repent, put away their gods, and hold fast to love and justice and wait continually for God* (6).

The difference between Jacob and the NK is, Jacob repented. The NK did not. Rather, they maintained their innocence.

2) A schemer who maintained his innocence

The NK heard the preaching of Hosea and said, *What? We haven't sinned.* They offered as evidence of their innocence, *Ah, but I am rich; I have found wealth for myself; In all my labors they cannot find in me iniquity or sin* (8). What an audacious claim!

The contrast with Jacob is clear.^{ix} He repented and was transformed. The NK maintained their innocence.

God sent his word to them over and over through prophetic witness—Hosea, Jacob, Moses (10-13). Unlike Jacob, they would not return to the LORD but rather provoked him. He would repay them for their deeds (2, 14).

Their scheming attempts at self-salvation would lead to guilt and death.

B. God judges self-gratifying idolatry (13:1-16)

If chapter 12 indicted them for their scheming alliances and Assyria and Egypt, chapter 13 indicts them for their self-gratifying idolatry (1-3). Idolatry at its core is the exaltation of self—exalting our wants, our desires, our imaginations to the place of the infinite.

Two very powerful statements are made in this chapter: *you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior* (4), and *He destroys you, O Israel, for you are against me, against your helper* (9).

It takes a high view of self to think we do not need a Savior. People will never come to Christ until they come face to face with their inability to save themselves. It takes the irresistible, effectual work of God's unconditional grace to awaken a man to his sin, to his own inability, and to his need for God's mercy.

This chapter is framed by Ephraim's exalted sense of self and their *guilt* and *death* (1,16). We don't have time to unpack everything in between, but I do want to show where sinful, self-gratifying idolatry leads.

They were exalted but they *incurred guilt through Baal and died* (1). They were fruitful among their brothers (15a) but they would bear their guilt and fall by the sword (16a).

The guilt and death that their idolatry brought is powerfully stated in verse 14. The rhetorical questions of verse 14 are fitting.

YHWH asks, *Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them*

from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting (14)?

The answer to the questions of verse 14 is in the last line: *Compassion is hidden from my eyes. No ransom. No redemption. Just death in all its implications.*

Verse 14 may sound familiar to you. In 1 Corinthians 15:55, Paul combines elements of this text (*O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?*) with Isaiah 25:8 (*Death is swallowed up in victory*).

He writes: *Death is swallowed up in victory. On death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? (1Cor. 15:55)*

He takes a positive verse, Isaiah 25:8, and a negative verse, Hosea 13:14, and argues that the issue of *guilt and death* is resolved only in Christ: *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our LORD Jesus Christ (1Cor 15:56-57).*

How is death swallowed? The resurrection of Jesus. How is the death defeated and the sting removed? Union with Christ. *Death and Sheol* have their commission, but in Jesus Christ, this negative has become a positive. Now because of the resurrection power of Jesus, death has no plague, and the grave has no destructive power. Thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ who gives us the victory.

How can the scheming self-preserved and the idolatrous self-gratifier be saved from death?

3. The way back to God (14:1-9)

We have seen God's relentless, pursuing love for his son and his judgment on his wayward son; mercifully, the book closes with the way back to God.

Perhaps, you are at a place in your life where you do not know where to start. I think a lot of people are at that place. *How do I come to God? I've made such a mess of things. I don't know where to begin.*

I have good news for you. Start right here in this text and do what it says.

A. Return to the LORD (1-3)

You start by repenting. Verses 1 and 2 tell us to *return*. The language of verse one tells us that returning is turning to God and turning from sin (1). True repentance is an encounter with God that totally reorients your life. No more excuses. No more

blame. No more pride. Simply humility before God.

You can return because God is calling you to return in this text. God is calling you to return to him.

I want you to understand that this call to repentance is not legalistic but relational. I'm calling on you to come home to God.

B. Accept responsibility for your sin (1b)

The first step in returning to God is to accept responsibility for your sin. The victim mentality is in vogue right now, but it will lead you to despair. Human nature is to blame others or our circumstances. We make excuses. Hosea says clearly, *Return ... for you have stumbled because of your iniquity* (1b).

C. Honestly confess (2)

The way of repentance is the way of honest confession. God is so kind to make repentance as easy as possible. He tells us what to say. You may not know what to say.

In the mercy of God, the prophet gave us a prayer of repentance: *Take with you words, return to the LORD, and say to him ...* (2a).

Hosea says, *take with you words*, not offerings, rituals, and rites (cf. 6:6), but *words*. He gives us the words. Formalities are over. It's time to do business with God.

1) Take away all my iniquity (2b)

It is a powerful experience to say to God, *take away all my iniquity* (2b). *Please, forgive me* is a life altering sentence. Too often we try to hide our sin. We may even avoid calling our sin by name when we are talking to God.

Take away is a beautiful word. It means *to lift, to bear away, to carry away*. Take away *all*,^x I'm holding nothing back. This is honest confession.

2) Accept what is good (2c)

This sentence is a little strange to us: *Accept what is good*. Some translations have it, *receive us graciously*. The phrase is not saying, take whatever is good in me as

part of my payment to lessen my sin debt. Rather, it is a plea for God to receive our sincere repentance. The LORD accepts the repentance of sinful men.

The prophets is not saying offer sacrifices but offer sincere words of repentance (cf. 6:6). Honest confession of sin is what God accepts, the vow (fruit) of our lips.

3) Trust in the LORD alone for your salvation (3a,b)

We must turn from old ways of living. Hosea has consistently preached against the foreign alliances and idolatry that Israel was trusting for their salvation. He calls on Israel to confess and forsake those sins. Besides him there is no Savior (cf. 13:4).

4) Rejoice in our adoption as sons (3c)

God's love and mercy for the orphan is the best news ever (cf. Ex. 22:22). Why mention God's mercy to the orphan? Israel had to realize that they, like everybody else, were orphans. They were not natural born sons, but God called them out of slavery and made them his adopted sons.

To confess that the orphan finds mercy in him is to see that in our helpless state, God has had mercy on us and made us his sons.

D. Rest in the blessing of God (4-8)

Repentance is followed by restoration. We need to know that God has accepted us and given us new life. Restoration is the focus of verses 4-8. These verses show the undeserved mercy and grace of God.

Come to Christ. He will *heal your apostasy* (4a), that is your turning away from God.^{xi}

He will *love you freely* (4b): uncoerced, generous, overflowing love. Why would he love them freely, *because his anger is turned from them* (4b).

God will pour his blessing out on his people (5-8).

Conclusion:

God's pursuing love flows to us because his obedient son has taken the wrath that we deserve, so that we might repent and know God's unbounded love and blessing.

ⁱ Structurally: there is a statement of hope (1:10-2:1; 11:9-11); a statement of judgement (2:2-13; 11:12-13:16); a statement of hope (3:1-5; 14:1-8).

ⁱⁱ See Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the OT*, 271. The theme of God's love for his son, Israel, ties these final chapters together. When Israel was a young boy (na'ar), God loved him and called his son out of Egypt (11:1). He taught Ephraim to walk (11:3). When his son rebels, God laments, *How can I give you up, O Ephraim* (11:8)? God's unwise son (13:13) would face the consequences of his sin (11:5-7; 13:8-9). God, however, would make a way for the orphaned Israel (cf. 14:3) to return to him and be restored to sonship (14:1-2).

ⁱⁱⁱ Dearman, *Hosea*, NICOT, 280.

^{iv} *Give up* and *make you like* in the first two parallel pairs is the same word (natan). It has a wide semantic range but the meaning is clear.

^v Gen 10:19; 14:2,8; 19, 25,28; Deut 29:23

^{vi} See also Genesis 19:29 and Deuteronomy 29:23.

^{vii} The words *lies*, *deceit*, and *falsehood* (11:12-12:1) are key words in the LORD's case against Israel.

^{viii} which meant, *heel grabber*, an idiom for *supplanter* or *deceiver*.

^{ix} *Found* (masa, 8) is the same word translated *met* in the phrase, *Jacob met God at Bethel* (4c). *Wealth* (on, 8) is the same word that is translated *manhood* in the phrase, *in his manhood he strove with God* (3b).

^x *All* is the first word in the Hebrew text to show emphasis.

^{xi} Both *turning away* (11:7) and *apostasy* (14:4) are *mesuba*.