

Hosea

1¹ The Lord sent a message to Hosea son of Beeri at the time when Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz were the kings of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash^a was the king of Israel. ² The Lord began speaking through Hosea by telling him, “Go and take a wife who is a prostitute and have children born to a prostitute^b because those living in this land have committed terrible prostitution by turning away from the Lord.”

³ So Hosea went and married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. She became pregnant and bore Hosea a son. ⁴ The Lord told Hosea, “Call him Jezreel,^c because I am going to punish the house of Jehu for the blood he shed at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. ⁵ On that day I will break Israel's military power in the valley of Jezreel.”

⁶ Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. The Lord told Hosea, “Call her Lo-ruhamah,^d because I will no longer love the house of Israel and certainly not forgive them. ⁷ But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them—but I will not save them by bow or sword or war or horses and riders.”

⁸ After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. ⁹ The Lord told Hosea, “Call him Lo-ammi,^e because you are not my people and I am not your God.^f ¹⁰ Even so^g the number of the people of Israel will be like the sand

^a**1:1.** Spelled here “Joash.”

^b**1:2.** Literally “children of prostitution.” There is much debate over this phrase. Some believe this indicates that Gomer had children as a result of her prostitution before marrying Hosea. Others believe this could have happened later as she returned to her former ways (note that only the first child, Jezreel, is clearly identified as being Hosea's). Still others believe that this means any children Hosea had with Gomer would be tainted by her reputation as a prostitute.

^c**1:4.** Jezreel means “the Lord will sow” (or scatter, since that was the way in which seed was sown). Jezreel was historically a place of much violence and bloodshed.

^d**1:6.** The name means “unloved.”

^e**1:9.** The name means “not my people.”

^f**1:9.** Literally, “I am not yours.”

^g**1:10.** “Even so”—transition supplied. The Hebrew simply says “and.”

on the seashore that cannot be measured or counted. Then right there at the place where they were told ‘you are not my people’ they will be called ‘the children of the living God.’¹¹ The people of Israel and the people of Judah will be gathered together and they will choose one leader for themselves and they will take possession of the land, and the day of Jezreel will be great.”

2¹ “On that day you will call your brothers Ammi, and you will call your sisters Ruhamah.^h ² Condemn your mother, condemn her because she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Tell her to stop looking like a prostitute—get rid of the makeup and the provocative clothing.ⁱ

³ Otherwise I will strip her naked as the day she was born, and make her like a desert, a barren land, and let her die of thirst. ⁴ I will have no pity on her children because they are children of prostitution. ⁵ For their mother was a prostitute who conceived them in a shameful way. She said, ‘I’ll run after my lovers who give me my food and water, my wool and flax and olive oil, and my drink.’

⁶ That is why I am going to block her path with thorn bushes, and build a stone wall to stop her so she won’t find her way. ⁷ When she runs after her lovers she won’t catch up with them; she’ll look for them but she won’t find them. Then she’ll say, ‘Let me go back to my former husband, because it was better for me then than now.’

⁸ She doesn’t consider that it was me who gave her grain, new wine, and olive oil; the silver and the gold which I gave her abundantly that they made into an idol of Baal. ⁹ So I will take back my ripened grain and my new wine I gave at harvest time. I will take back my wool and my flax I provided to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ I will strip her naked while her lovers watch; no one will be able to rescue her from me. ¹¹ I will put a stop to all her festivities: her feasts, new moon celebrations, special Sabbaths—all her festivals.^j ¹² I will

^h2:1. Ammi means “my people,” and Ruhamah means “pitied” or “loved.”

ⁱ2:2. Literally, “Let her remove her fornication from her face and her adultery from between her breasts.” The exact meaning is unclear. Possibilities include: the suggestive looks of a prostitute; the prostitute’s makeup and jewelry; revealing clothing; or a prostitute’s actions with her lovers. In any case the main sense is clear: Israel is to stop prostituting herself with other gods.

^j2:11. While the celebrations mentioned are all part of the religious calendar, it seems that they had become an excuse for partying rather than true observance.

destroy her vines and fig trees that she said were given to her as payment for being a prostitute. I will turn them into scrub-land; only wild animals will eat the remaining fruit. ¹³ I will punish her for all the times she offered incense to Baal, dressing herself up, putting on rings and jewelry, going after her lovers, but forgetting about me, declares the Lord.

¹⁴ See what I'm going to do! I will win her back, taking her into the desert where I will speak to her heart-to-heart. ¹⁵ There I will return her vineyards to her and make the Valley of Achor^k a door of hope. There she will respond to me as she did when she was young, as in the time when she left the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ Then on that day, says the Lord, you will call me 'my husband' and not 'my Baal.'¹ ¹⁷ I will stop her appealing to the Baals—their names won't be mentioned ever again.

¹⁸ At that time I will make a solemn agreement^m with the wild animals and the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. I will do away with the bow and the sword; I will abolish war from the land so you can lie down in safety. ¹⁹ I will make you my wife forever; I will make you my wife in goodness and justice and love and mercy. ²⁰ I will be faithful to you, my wife, and you will know me as the Lord. ²¹ On that day, declares the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they will answer the earth.ⁿ ²² The earth will answer the grain, and the new wine, and the olive oil, and they shall answer, 'Jezreel' (God sows). ²³ I will 'sow' her for myself in the earth. I will love Lo-ruhamah (unloved) and I will say 'you are my people' to Lo-ammi (not my people), and they will say 'You are my God.'"

^k2:15. "Achor" means "trouble." See Joshua 7:26.

^l2:16. "My Baal" would normally be translated as "my lord," but since the context is that of Israel following pagan religions who called their god (s) "Baal" then this is more appropriate here. In addition, God wants the close relationship of being Israel's husband rather than simply her Lord.

^m2:18. Or "covenant." Here it implies that these creatures will not hurt the people of Israel.

ⁿ2:21. This is usually understood to mean that the clouds will give rain to the earth.

3¹ The Lord told me, “Go again and love a woman^o who is loved by another and who is committing adultery, just as the Lord loves the children of Israel, even though they turn to other gods and love their sensual worship.”^p ² So I bought her back for fifteen shekels of silver and one and half homer of barley.^q ³ I told her, “You must remain with me for many days and you shall stop your prostitution. You shall not be intimate with any man, and then I shall be yours.” ⁴ For the people of Israel shall be without a king or a prince, without a sacrifice or a stone pillar or a pagan image or an idolatrous shrine^r for a long time. ⁵ After this, the people of Israel will return and dedicate themselves to the Lord their God and to the line of David their king. In the last days they will come with awe and reverence for the Lord and his goodness.

4¹ Hear the word of the Lord, people of Israel, for the Lord has an accusation against the inhabitants of the land! “There is no faithfulness, no loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. ² Instead there is only cursing, lying, murdering, stealing, and adultery. They commit violence, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. ³ As a result the land dries up,^s and everyone who lives there is wasting away, along with the wild animals and the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea—they are all dying. ⁴ But no one should accuse or blame anyone else. My quarrel is with you the priests—you are the ones responsible.^t ⁵ Consequently you will

^o3:1. “A woman”—understood to be Gomer from what follows. It may be that Gomer is not specifically identified since she cannot claim to be Hosea’s wife because of her adultery.

^p3:1. Literally “raisin cakes”—part of the pagan worship rituals.

^q3:2. About the cost of an ordinary slave. Why Hosea had to buy her back is unclear; in some way she had become someone’s “property.”

^r3:4. The phrase “a stone pillar or a pagan image or an idolatrous shrine” are all aspects of Israel’s adultery in following other gods. Even “king” and “prince” were symbols of Israel’s rejection of God as their leader

^s4:3. Or “is mourning.”

^t4:4. What seems to be meant here is that the priests have done such a poor job of representing God and leading the people in correct ways that there’s no point in ordinary people blaming one another.

stumble in daylight, and the prophet^u will stumble together with you in the night, and I will destroy your mother.^v

⁶ My people are dying because they don't know me. Because you have refused to know me, I refuse to accept you as my priests. You have forgotten my teachings, so I will forget your children. ⁷ The more there were of them,^w the more they sinned against me, so I will change their glory into shame. ⁸ They feed on the sin^x of my people, greedy for their iniquity. ⁹ So it will be for the people like the priests: I will punish them for what they have done, repaying them for their actions. ¹⁰ They will eat, but they will not be satisfied; they will engage in prostitution,^y but they will not prosper because they have given up on the Lord to go and prostitute themselves to other gods.

¹¹ They destroy their minds with old wine and new wine.

¹² My people consult their wooden idols and their divining rods give them answers, for a spirit of prostitution makes them go astray. Prostituting themselves, they have deserted their God. ¹³ They offer sacrifices on the tops of mountains; they burn incense in the hills under the oak, poplar, and terebinth trees where the shade is pleasant. That's the reason why your daughters practice prostitution and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. ¹⁴ I will not punish your daughters when they practice prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because you men visit whores and sacrifice with temple prostitutes. A people who lack understanding end up in disaster.

^u4:5. Presumably false prophets.

^v4:5. Mother—meaning the nation of Israel.

^w4:7. Referring to the priests.

^x4:8. Or “sin offerings.” Because the priests were given a share of what was offered, it was in their interest to increase the need for sacrifices.

^y4:10. Prostitution here can have various meanings—the basic act of adultery, visiting temple priestesses/prostitutes as part of pagan “worship,” and spiritual prostitution through breaking vows to the true God by following heathen gods.

¹⁵ Though you, Israel, have become a prostitute, may Judah not offend in the same way and not enter Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven,^z nor swear saying, ‘the Lord lives.’ ¹⁶ For Israel is as stubborn as a stubborn cow. Should the Lord then take care of them like a lamb in a wide pasture? ¹⁷ Ephraim^a is bewitched^b by idols, so leave him alone! ¹⁸ Once the leaders finish drinking, they go off and find prostitutes to sleep with. They love their shameful acts more than honor. ¹⁹ A wind will carry them away; they will be ashamed of their pagan worship.

5 ¹ Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, house of Israel! Listen, members of the royal family! ² Judgment belongs with you^c because you have been a snare set at Mizpah and a net spread out on Tabor.^d You dug a deep trap in Shittim,^e but I will punish you for all these things you have done. ³ I know Ephraim very well, and Israel cannot hide from me, for now Ephraim is a prostitute and Israel is defiled. ⁴ Your actions stop you from coming back to your God for a spirit of prostitution is within you and you do not know the Lord. ⁵ Israel's pride speaks against them, right in the face. Israel and Ephraim will stumble because of their guilt, and Judah will stumble along with them. ⁶ They will go to seek the Lord with their herds and

^z**4:15.** One place that was called Gilgal was where the Israelites crossed the Jordan and set up a stone monument (see Joshua 4). It may be that Gilgal actually refers to a circle of standing stones, and so there may be more than one place so named. Certainly Hosea's condemnation indicates that this particular Gilgal had become associated with pagan worship. Beth-aven is a deliberate misnaming of Beth-el. Beth-el means “house of God” but Hosea chooses to call the place Beth-aven, meaning “house of nothingness.”

^a**4:17.** Ephraim was the leading tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel and so was often used to describe the whole kingdom.

^b**4:17.** The word used can mean “joined to” or “enchanted, under a spell.”

^c**5:2.** The phrase is literally “for you the judgment” and so is ambiguous. It could simply mean that God's judgment is against these leaders; but it could also mean that the power of judgment belongs to them and they have not exercised this authority wisely.

^d**5:2.** Both Mizpah and Mt. Tabor had particular historical significance for Israel but are now sites of degradation.

^e**5:2.** Shittim was the last place the Israelites camped before crossing the Jordan (Numbers 25).

flocks,^f but they will not find him, for he has given up on them.

⁷They have been unfaithful to the Lord and have had children that are not his.^g Now the New Moon will destroy them along with their fields.^h

⁸Blow the horn in Gibeah! Sound the trumpet in Ramah! Shout an alarm in Beth-aven! Lead the way, Benjamin!ⁱ ⁹Ephraim will be left desolate on the day of punishment. Among the tribes of Israel I will reveal what is the real truth. ¹⁰The rulers of Judah have become thieves like those who illegally move boundaries. I will pour out my anger like water upon them.^j ¹¹The people of Ephraim are crushed, smashed to pieces in judgment because they were determined to follow human commands.^k ¹²I am like a maggot to Ephraim, and like something rotten to the people of Judah.

¹³When Ephraim saw how sick they were, and Judah saw how wounded they were, Ephraim turned to the great king of Assyria for help, but he could not heal them or cure their wounds. ¹⁴For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a fierce lion to the people of Judah. I will come and tear them to pieces, and carry them off, and no one will be able to rescue them. ¹⁵Then I will leave and return to where I

^f5:6. The mention of herds and flocks indicate that the people were using many sacrifices and offerings, thinking God would be pleased. However, theirs is not a true worship, but is more like pagan worship trying to appease the deity.

^g5:7. The word used here of the children is that they are “foreign”—meaning that they are both illegitimate and also the offspring of “foreign” gods.

^h5:7. Various explanations of this sentence have been given. The observance of new Moon festivals was part of Israelite worship but had become corrupted (see for example Is. 1:13) so this could be now taken as a symbol for pagan worship. In addition the northern kingdom under Jeroboam had instituted different festivals which were not ordained of God (see 1 Kings 12:33). The main point is the corrupting influence of pagan beliefs on the genuine worship of the true God.

ⁱ5:8. The three places mentioned are on the northern border between Judah and Israel in the territory of the southern tribe of Benjamin.

^j5:10. See a similar image in Isaiah 8:5-10 describing the end of the northern kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians.

^k5:11. This verse has been linked to the decision of King Menahem of Israel's decision to agree to a huge payment in silver to the Assyrian king as a means of avoiding conflict (see 2 Kings 15:19-20). Others have thought the “human commands” are Jeroboam's institution of calves as images to worship (1 Kings 12). Alternatively the end of this verse could also be translated “determined to follow idolatry.”

came from until they acknowledge their wrongs, and in their distress they will seek my face and beg for my help.”

6¹ “Come on! Let’s go back to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but now he will heal us. He has struck us down, but now he will bind up our wounds. ²In two days he will heal us; after three days he will raise us up so we can live in his presence. ³Let’s get to know the Lord, really strive to know him, and he will appear to us as surely as the sun will rise; he will come to us as certainly as the spring rains fall on the earth.” ⁴Ephraim,¹ what shall I do with you? Judah, what shall I do with you? Your love disappears like mist at dawn; it vanishes like dew in the morning. ⁵So I cut you down through the prophets; I killed you with my words. My judgment shines out like a light. ⁶I want your true love, not your sacrifices; I want you to know me, not your burnt offerings.

⁷But you, just like Adam, broke our agreement,^m there you were unfaithful to me. ⁸Gilead is a city of evil people where footprints are tracked in blood. ⁹Priests are like a gang of bandits, lying in wait to ambush travelers on the road. They commit murder in Shechem, carrying out wicked crimes. ¹⁰I have seen in the house of Israel something totally disgusting: Ephraim engages in prostitution and Israel is sexually corrupt.ⁿ ¹¹And as for you, Judah, your harvest-time has been set! When I restore the fortunes of my people,^o

7¹ when I heal Israel, Ephraim’s sins will be exposed, together with the evil actions of Samaria. They deal in lies; they are thieves who break into homes and rob people on the outside. ²But they don’t realize that I remember all of their wickedness. Their sins surround them and are always before me. ³They make their king happy with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. ⁴All of them are adulterers, burning with lust like an oven whose fire stays hot, even though it is not tended by the baker, having left the dough

¹6:4. Ephraim was taken as representative of the northern kingdom of Israel, and Judah the south.

^m6:7. Literally, “covenant.”

ⁿ6:10. The image of prostitution and sexual immorality is used to describe Israel’s spiritual adultery in following other gods.

^o6:11. This latter phrase is better taken with the beginning of the following chapter.

to rise after kneading.^p ⁵ On the king's birthday^q the princes drink so much they are sick, while he joins in with those who mock. ⁶ Their minds are fired up like an oven; they go to him with their plots. All through the night their anger burns; in the morning it blazes out uncontrollably. ⁷ All of them are as hot as a burning oven, and they exhaust their leaders. All of their kings have fallen, and not one of them calls on me.

⁸ Ephraim mixes with the foreign nations; he is as useless as half-baked bread!^r ⁹ Foreigners drain his strength, and he doesn't even realize it. His hair is turning grey and he doesn't even notice. ¹⁰ Israel's pride testifies against him, but for all of this he still does not return to the Lord their God or look for him. ¹¹ Ephraim is like a dove, foolish and without sense—calling to Egypt, then going to Assyria. ¹² When they go I will throw my net over them; I will bring them down like wild birds. When I hear them flocking together I will punish them.

¹³ What disaster is coming to them because they have strayed from me! Destruction is coming to them because they have rebelled against me! I wish I could redeem them, but they tell lies about me. ¹⁴ They do not cry out to me with sincere minds; instead they lie on their beds howling. They assemble together and gash themselves^s to gain grain and new wine, but they turn away from me. ¹⁵ I myself trained them and made them strong, but now they plot evil against me. ¹⁶ They turn, but not to the Most High; they are like a useless bow. Their leaders will be killed by the sword because of their cursing.^t Because of this they will be ridiculed in Egypt.

8 ¹ Put a trumpet to your lips! An eagle^u swoops over the house of the Lord because they have broken my agreement and rebelled against my law. ² Israel calls out to me, “Our God, we know you!”

P7:4. The image is of a very hot fire that is prepared for baking bread. The rising of the dough is compared to the time of Israel before their end, carried off into captivity. It also seems to be a reference to the king who does nothing to keep the fire of apostasy under control.

q7:5. Literally, “the day of the king.”

r7:8. Literally, “a flat bread that is not turned over.”

s7:14. A practice used in pagan worship—see 1 Kings 18:28.

t7:16. Usually understood to be cursing against God.

u8:1. Symbolic of an invading enemy.

³ But Israel has rejected what is good. An enemy will chase after them. ⁴ They appointed kings without my consent and chose princes without my knowledge. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. ⁵ Samaria, I reject this calf idol you have made! My anger burns against them! How long will you be incapable of being good? ⁶ This idol is from Israel! A craftsman made it—it's not God! The calf of Samaria will be broken in pieces!

⁷ Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head of grain; it will produce no flour. Even if it did produce grain, foreigners would swallow it all up. ⁸ Israel is swallowed up; among the nations they are like something nobody wants. ⁹ They have gone up to Assyria like a donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers. ¹⁰ Even though they have hired allies among the nations, I will gather them^v together. Then they will writhe under the burden of the great king.^w ¹¹ Though Ephraim built many altars to make sin offerings, they instead became altars of sin! ¹² I wrote down for them the many aspects of my law, but they looked on them as foreign.^x ¹³ They present me with their sacrifices, and they eat the meat, but I the Lord do not accept them. Now he will remember their wickedness, and punish them for their sins. They will return to Egypt. ¹⁴ Israel has forgotten his maker, and built palaces; Judah has built many fortified cities. But I will rain fire down on their cities and burn up their fortresses.

9 ¹ Israel, don't rejoice! Don't celebrate like other nations! For you have practiced prostitution; you have loved a prostitute's wages on every threshing floor of grain.^y ² Your threshing floors and winepresses will not feed you; the land will fail to produce your new wine. ³ You will not stay in the Lord's land, instead Ephraim will return to Egypt, and will eat unclean food in Assyria. ⁴ You won't pour out any drink offerings to the Lord. None of your sacrifices will please him. Your sacrifices will be like food eaten by a person

8:10. This could refer either to the Israelites or to the nations. Even though Israel tried to hire allies, eventually these allies worked together against Israel.

8:10. Referring to the burden of taxation needed to pay off foreign invaders, particularly the Assyrians.

8:12. In other words, they regarded the law as not applying to them.

9:1. The threshing floor where grain was processed after harvest was often the place where fertility gods were worshiped in connection with a good harvest.

in mourning^z—all who eat will be unclean. You will eat this food yourselves, but it will not enter the house of the Lord. ⁵ What are you going to do on the days of your appointed religious feasts, on the days of the festivals of the Lord?^a ⁶ Look, they have left because of the destruction: Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. They gain a “valued possession” for their silver.^b Weeds will possess them, and thorns will grow over their tents.

⁷ The time of punishment has come; the day of retribution has arrived. Let Israel know! You say^c the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad, because your sin and hostility is so great.

⁸ The watchman over Ephraim is with my God, and a prophet is a birdcatcher's snare on all his ways.^d Hatred is in the house of his God ⁹ for they have corrupted themselves so deeply, as in the time of Gibeah.^e He will remember their sin; he will punish their wickedness.

¹⁰ When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert. When I saw your forefathers it was like seeing early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they gave themselves over to that shameful idol, becoming as filthy as the filthy thing they loved.^f ¹¹ Ephraim! Like a bird that flies away so shall your glory—no births, no pregnancies, no conceptions. ¹² Even if they bring up children, I will make sure they do not survive. What a disaster for you when I turn away from you! ¹³ Ephraim! Just as I saw Tyre planted in a meadow, so too Ephraim will lead out his

^z9:4. A person in mourning would have touched a dead body, making them unclean (see Leviticus 21:11, Numbers 19:11 etc.)

^a9:5. This may refer specifically to the special day instituted by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:32) as a substitute religious observance in the northern shrines, in contrast to the true days given by God that were celebrated in the southern kingdom.

^b9:6. Obviously there is a degree of sarcasm here. By fleeing to Egypt, all they received in return for their payment was ruin and death.

^c9:7. Implied. Clearly this is the view of the people.

^d9:8. Some have seen this as the work of a false prophet, but bearing in my Israel's sinfulness, a true prophet would be regarded by the people as setting snares for them, following the reasoning of the preceding verse.

^e9:9. This alludes to the story of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 and on.

^f9:10. This refers to the incident in Numbers 25 when the people of Israel were seduced by Moabite women into immoral sexual worship of their god.

children to the murderer.^g ¹⁴ Give them—well, Lord, what should you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and dry breasts.^h ¹⁵ All of their evil began at Gilgal, and that's where I began to hate them. I will drive them out of my house because of their wickedness. I will love them no longer; all their leaders are rebels. ¹⁶ Ephraim, you are blighted, dried up from the roots. You shall bear no fruit. Even if you have children, I will slaughter your beloved offspring. ¹⁷ My God will reject you because you have not listened to him, and you will become homeless wanderers among the nations.

10 ¹ Israel is like a spreadingⁱ vine that produces fruit for itself. The more fruit they produced, the more altars^j they built. The more productive the land, the more beautiful they made the sacred pillars.^k ² The people have minds that are deceptive, and now they must take responsibility for their guilt. The Lord will break apart their altars and destroy their sacred pillars. ³ Then they will say, “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord, and yet what would a king do for us?” ⁴ They speak empty words, swearing false promises to make a covenant.¹ Their “justice” flourishes like poisonous weeds in the furrows of a field. ⁵ Those who live in Samaria tremble in awe at the calf of Beth-aven.^m Its people mourn for it in their pagan rituals, while its idolatrous priests celebrate its glory. But it will

^g9:13. Both Israel and the people of Tyre practiced child sacrifice. Both cities were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

^h9:14. Since Baal worship centered on fertility, barrenness was a clear punishment, opposite of what fertility gods claimed.

ⁱ10:1. The word used here usually means “to lay waste.” While many translations use terms such as “luxuriant,” the point made here is that this vine is unpruned and overgrown, and additionally only produces fruit “for itself”—not a good description of a productive vine for the gardener.

^j10:1. Altars used for pagan worship.

^k10:1. Again, pagan symbols used for the worship of fertility gods.

^l10:4. The context is making false promises to God of agreements they do not intend to keep.

^m10:5. The real name of the place was Bethel, the house of God, but because of the pagan practices celebrated there the later prophets referred to it as Beth-aven, the house of nothingness (idols).

certainly be taken away from them.ⁿ It will be brought to Assyria as tribute for the great king. ⁶ Ephraim will be disgraced, and Israel will be ashamed at its own decisions.^o ⁷ Samaria and its king will be destroyed, swept away like a twig on the surface of the water. ⁸ The high places of Aven,^p where Israel sinned, will be demolished, and thorns and thistles will grow over their altars. Then they will call to the mountains, “Bury us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

⁹ Since the days of Gibeah you have been sinning, Israel, and you haven't changed. Do the people of Gibeah think that war will not come to them? ¹⁰ When I choose I will punish the wicked. The nations will be gathered together against them when they are punished for their double crime.

¹¹ Ephraim is like a trained heifer that loved to thresh the grain, but now I will place a yoke on her strong neck. I will harness Ephraim; Judah will have to pull the plough; and Jacob must break up the ground for himself. ¹² Sow for yourselves what is right and you will reap unfailing love. Break up the unploughed ground. It's time to go to the Lord until he comes and rains down goodness on you. ¹³ But instead you have planted wickedness and reaped an evil harvest. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own strength and in your many warriors. ¹⁴ The terrifying noise of battle will rise against your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, just as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel in the time of war. Even mothers and children were dashed to pieces. ¹⁵ This is what will happen to you, Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn, the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed.

ⁿ10:5. The verbs used in this verse describe the pagan worship of Baal, in which his death is mourned with self-mutilation and then his return is celebrated with orgiastic rites. However, the idol will eventually be taken away by the Assyrians when they invade.

^o10:6. Decisions—that it trusted in idols, and sought help from heathen nations.

^p10:8. Where the pagan shrines were located.

11¹ I loved Israel when he was a child. He's my son I called out of Egypt.² As they called them, so they went from them:^q they sacrificed to the Baals and offered incense to idols.³ I myself taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the hand,^r but they didn't realize I was the one who healed them.^s ⁴I led them along with cords of kindness, with ropes of love. I was the one who eased their burden and bent down to feed them.^t ⁵However, because my people refuse to return to me, they will not return to the land of Egypt^u but Assyria shall be their king.⁶ War^v will sweep through their cities, putting an end to their boasting and destroying their plans.⁷ My people are hanging on to their apostasy from me. They call him “god on high”^w but he will not raise them up at all.

⁸How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I let you go, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?^x My heart is breaking; I am full of compassion.⁹ I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God, not a human being. I am the Holy One living among you. I will not enter your cities.^y

^q**11:2.** Sometimes this is translated: “The more I called them, the more they went from me,” but this requires significant changes to the original text. What the Hebrew text appears to be saying, in the context of the Exodus from Egypt, is that as they (Israel) called them (Egypt) was the way in which they (Israel) went from them (Egypt). In other words even at the Exodus Israel was hankering after the things of Egypt and only left under pressure. Many would have preferred to stay, and Hosea traces the apostasy he is dealing with to a reluctant and rebellious spirit of some even at the time of the Exodus. This is confirmed by the second part of the verse.

^r**11:3.** Literally, “arm.”

^s**11:3.** In the context of the Exodus see Exodus 15:26.

^t**11:4.** The image shifts to care for a farm animal. The Hebrew literally says, “I became like those who lift up a yoke that was in their jaws.” The burden is not removed altogether, but is made easier to bear.

^u**11:5.** Even though they are not taken into captivity to Egypt, they are still led away in bondage—this time to Assyria.

^v**11:6.** Literally, “the sword.”

^w**11:7.** Israel called their idol “El Al,” or “god on high,” but this was a deliberately confusing title that merged together the worship of Yahweh and Baal.

^x**11:8.** Admah and Zeboiim were the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 14:2).

^y**11:9.** Meaning God would not totally annihilate them as he did with the cities mentioned above.

¹⁰ The people will follow me, the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When he roars like a lion then his children will come trembling from the west. ¹¹ Like a flock of frightened birds they will come from Egypt, like doves they will come from Assyria, and I will bring them back home, declares the Lord.

¹² Ephraim surrounds me with lies and Israel with deceit, and Judah still wanders with some deity, faithful to some “Holy One.”^z

12 ¹ Ephraim tries to herd the wind, chasing after the east wind all day long. Their lies and violence keep on increasing. They make a treaty with Assyria, and send olive oil to Egypt.^a ² The Lord also has an accusation against Judah, and will punish Jacob for the way the people act; he will repay them for what they have done.

³ Even in the womb he fought with his brother;^b when he became a man he fought with God. ⁴ He fought with the angel, and he won. He wept, and begged him for a blessing. Jacob found God at Bethel, and spoke with him there— ⁵ the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his memorable name! ⁶ You must return to your God. Act lovingly and do what is right, and always wait for your God.

⁷ A merchant who holds in his hands dishonest scales loves to swindle. ⁸ Ephraim says, “I’m rich! I’ve made myself wealthy! I’ve made so much from my work, and nobody can prove me guilty of doing wrong.”

⁹ But I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. I will make you live again in tents like you do at the time of that particular festival.^c

¹⁰ I spoke through the prophets. I myself gave many visions and parables through the prophets.

^z**11:12.** It seems that Judah was merging ideas from pagan worship with that of the true God, and using the term “el” which was the name of the highest Canaanite god but could also be applied to Yahweh. So what is being said here seems to be that Judah too is wavering in its allegiance to the true God.

^a**12:1.** In other words, while making a treaty with Assyria they are covering their options by trying to gain support from Egypt as well by sending supplies of olive oil.

^b**12:3.** Literally, “he grasped his brother’s heel.”

^c**12:9.** This refers to the Festival of Tabernacles where the people lived outside in tents or shelters for a week to remember their journey through the wilderness.

¹¹ If Gilead is idolatrous,^d they will surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls. Even their altars are like heaps of rocks in the furrows of the field.^e

¹² Jacob fled to the land of Aram; Israel^f worked there to gain a wife, earning a wife by looking after sheep. ¹³ Through a prophet^g the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet they were cared for.^h

¹⁴ Ephraim has really upset the Lord, and the Lord will let them have the consequences of their bloodshed and pay them back for their contempt.

13 ¹ When Ephraim spoke, they were feared, for they were the leading tribe in Israel. But when they were guilty of Baal worship, they died. ² Now they constantly sin, making for themselves idols from molten metal. All of these idols are skillfully made from silver by their craftsmen. “Offer sacrifices to these idols,” say the people. “Kiss the bull calf idols.” ³ Consequently they will be like the morning mist, like early morning dew, like chaff blowing away from the threshing floor, like smoke from a chimney.

⁴ Yet I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall knowⁱ no other gods but me. None can save you except me. ⁵ I looked after you in the wilderness; in that dry desert land it was like pasture to them^j ⁶ and they were satisfied. But when they were satisfied they became arrogant, and they forgot me.^k ⁷ So I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lie in wait beside the path. ⁸ I will be like a mother bear whose cubs have been taken, I

^d12:11. The word used here is the same as in Beth-aven, the parody name for Bethel, signifying the worship of idols who are truly worthless, they are nothing.

^e12:11. This verse suggests mixed worship that merged idols with the true God. Like rocks in a ploughed field, this was barrier to knowing the true God.

^f12:12. Israel was the new name God gave to Jacob.

^g12:13. The prophet referenced here is Moses.

^h12:13. The same word is used for Jacob looking after sheep and the Lord looking after Israel through Moses.

ⁱ13:4. A variation of the Ten Commandments with “know” replacing “have” (Exodus 20:3). This change is significant in that the word “know” carries overtones of intimate relations, and can be linked to the erotic nature of Baal worship. Israel should not be “knowing” Baal but the true God.

^j13:5. “It was like pasture to them,” or “I fed them.”

^k13:6. See the warning that this could happen in Deuteronomy 8:11-14.

will rip out their hearts. I shall devour them like a lion, like a wild beast I will tear them apart. ⁹ You have destroyed yourselves, Israel, for your only help is in me. ¹⁰ Where then is your king? Let him save you in all your cities! Where are your leaders who demanded a king and princes from me? ¹¹ In my anger I give you a king, and in my fury I take one.^l

¹² Ephraim's guilt is packed up; their sin will be eradicated.^m ¹³ The pain of childbirth has come to them, trying to give birth to a son who is not “wise” because he is not in the right position when the time comes.ⁿ

¹⁴ I shall redeem them from the power of Sheol; I shall deliver them from death. Where, death, are your plagues? Where, Sheol, is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my sight.

¹⁵ Even though they flourish among the reeds,^o an east wind will come, a wind from the Lord that rises in the desert will dry up their springs and their wells will fail. It will rob from their treasury everything of value.

¹⁶ Samaria will have to bear the consequences of their guilt, because they rebelled against her God. They will be slaughtered by the sword; their children will be dashed to the ground; their pregnant women will be ripped open.

14 ¹ Return, Israel, to the Lord your God, because your sins have brought you down. ² Take words like these with you and come back to the Lord, saying to him, “Please take away all our guilt, accept what is good, and we will repay you with praise from our lips.

^l13:11. The verb forms used here are not past tense, so the usual translation referring back to God's provision of king Saul in response to the people's demands is problematic here. Since Hosea is dealing with the present situation of the northern kingdom, one interpretation is that the king God is giving is the king of Assyria, and the one he is taking is the king of Israel. Though in the previous verse God does mention the people's previous demand for a king, he begins that verse with the current question, “Where then is your king?”

^m13:12. “Eradicated”: literally, “concealed.” What Hosea seems to be saying is that Israel's sins have come to the point that God has to take action by eliminating the problem by allowing invasion and exile. The worship of Baal has to be ended (“concealed”—but not in sense of it being simply hidden away and continuing).

ⁿ13:13. This could refer to the problems of a breech baby delivery in which both mother and baby could potentially die.

^o13:15. Or “brothers.”

³ Assyria can't save us; we will not ride our warhorses; we will never again say 'You are our gods' to the idols we have made. For in you orphans find mercy."

⁴ I will heal their unfaithfulness; I will love them freely, for I'm not angry with them any more. ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel, they will blossom like lilies, they will send down roots like the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ They shall send out new shoots, their splendor will be like the olive tree, their scent will be like the cedars of Lebanon.

⁷ Those who live under their shade shall return, they will flourish like grain, they will blossom like the vine, and they will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

⁸ Ephraim, how much more do I have to warn you about idols?^p I have answered and now I am watching.^q I am like a tree that is evergreen; your fruit is found in me.

⁹ Who is wise to understand these things? Who has discernment in understanding them? The Lord's paths are right—the good follow them, but rebels trip and fall along the way.

^p14:8. In other words, God has had enough of the subject.

^q14:8. To see the people's response.