



Hosea - Chapter Eleven

II. Hosea 4:1-14:9 - Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

The final analogy of the four is here describing Israel as God's young child whom he had brought up out of Egyptian slavery and into the Promised Land. God had done everything a loving parent could do for his son but the more he did the more they turned away from him until he had no other option than to dismiss them from his sight. Yet his love remained and there would come a day when he would return them to their place.

II.i. Hosea 11:1-12:1 - God's Compassion Despite Israel's Ingratitude

Refer to the chapter summary above.

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

Hosea 11:1

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. Here is one of the most endearing passages in Hosea. The prophet uses another family metaphor, portraying the Lord not only as a husband but also as a father; refer also to the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32. This metaphor was not original to Hosea: <<*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son"*>> (Exodus 4:22). Matthew 2:15 uses the line out of Egypt I called my son to show that Jesus is the Son of God, i.e. the heir of David who embodies Israel's relationship to God: <<*I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings*>> (2 Samuel 7:14), and:

<<He shall cry to me, “You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!” I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth>> (Psalm 89:26-27).

- 2 The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.
- 3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
- 4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

Hosea 11:2-4

The more I called them, the more they went from me. God called Israel out of Egypt, but the idolatry of the Baals called to Israel, and they forsook the Lord and followed the Baals, the local deities of Canaan.

The Lord loved Israel from the beginning and never stopped loving them. Throughout their history, he taught Ephraim, that is Israel, to walk and he healed them, as a father does with his child.

I took them up in my arms. The picture is of a parent teaching a child how to walk by holding the child’s arms and supporting the child as they make their first awkward steps.

Some commentators think the image of a parent and a child continues in v.4 with I led them with cords of human kindness, with the bands of love. This meaning would be the light bands or cords with which a parent supports and guides a toddler who is learning to walk. However, because other translations have who lift infants to their cheeks as ‘remove the yolk from their jaw’, most commentators think that in v.4 the image changes to that of a kind farmer with his animals, who removes the yoke and leads the animal, not with harsh ropes and a yoke as in Hosea 10:11, but with light cords and bands to guide the animals to their food.

Then the Lord, like a gentle farmer, even bent down to them and fed them. God humbled himself to minister to his needy people. One might almost think it is beneath the dignity and honour of God to stoop down for his people, but he never thinks so. This is the heart reflected in the servant nature of Jesus seen especially in John 13:1-20 and Philipians Chapter 2.

In the ancient world, the empires of Persia and Greece fought bitter wars. There was said to be a great difference between their soldiers. In the Persian army, soldiers were like slaves and were driven into battle with whips and threats. In the Greek army, soldiers were free men and patriots, and fought for Sparta and Greece out of love for their country and a sense of duty. The smaller armies of Greece usually beat the larger armies of Persia. God calls Christians as an army of free people, grateful patriots of the Kingdom of God.

In all of this manifestation of grace, the Lord was not initiating a new basis for a relationship between him and his people, for the relationship from the beginning was never based on law but on redemptive grace. Among other places, this is illustrated by the preamble of the Ten Commandments: <<*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*>> (Exodus 20:2). It was God's love that provided and still provides the underpinning for an ultimate relationship of care, guidance, and obedience. Tragically, however, more than anything else, it was the Lord's love that was spurned: the more I called them, the more they went from me, and: <<*My people are bent on turning away from me*>> (v.7).

- ⁵ They shall return to the land of Egypt,
and Assyria shall be their king,
because they have refused to return to me.
- ⁶ The sword rages in their cities,
it consumes their oracle-priests,
and devours because of their schemes.
- ⁷ My people are bent on turning away from me.
To the Most High they call,
but he does not raise them up at all.

Hosea 11:5-7

They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king. Egypt has been used by Hosea as a name representing all foreign powers, indicating their time in bondage. This verse may mean that hope of finding deliverance from

bondage will fail. The Israelites will find themselves subject to a new pharaoh, not in Egypt but in Assyria.

Because they have refused to return to me. In this sense, it was not so much the sin of Israel that got them into trouble. It was their stubborn refusal to repent after their sin. For that, God would make sure that destruction and exile waited for them.

My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. **Bent on turning away from me** is also translated as backsliding, a term meaning that, at one time, Israel had a closer and more real walk with God: <<*I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father*>> (2 John 4), and: <<*I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 3-4). Now that is in the past, and their profession is simply empty. They call to **the Most High** in a formal sort of way, but they do not exalt him with their lives.

⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.

Hosea 11:8

How can I give you up? In highly anthropomorphic terms, the Lord pours out his irrepressible love; Isaiah 49:15 and Jeremiah 31:20 express the same sentiment. The relationship between God and his chosen must not be viewed as a formality. These emotional outpourings demonstrate that the Lord is a living God, filled with compassion – unlike the lifeless Baals. His affection weighs heavier than Israel's ingratitude, and he cannot bring himself to renounce his people, even though they renounce him.

How can I make you like Admah; like Zeboiim? These two cities were totally destroyed: <<*The next generation, your children who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country, will see the devastation of that land and the afflictions with which the Lord has afflicted it – all its soil burned out by sulphur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah*>>

and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his fierce anger>> (Deuteronomy 29:22-23). The love that the Lord has for his children restrains him from obliterating them. He will preserve Israel through a remnant: <<*So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace>>* (Romans 11:5).

- ⁹ I will not execute my fierce anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and no mortal,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.
- ¹⁰ They shall go after the Lord,
who roars like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west.
- ¹¹ They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

Hosea 11:9-11

I will not again destroy Ephraim. Although their sin deserves it, God will not wipe out Israel: <<*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end>>* (Lamentations 3:22). He will leave a remnant, and will restore the nation.

For I am God and no mortal. The longsuffering, forgiveness, and compassion of the Lord toward his people seems unbelievable until it is recognised that he is not man, but God: <<*For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished>>* (Malachi 3:6). His love and forgiveness are of a different order. There are many differences between God and man in the matter of forgiveness:

- Man cannot hold back his anger very long.
- Man cannot put up with others when he is tired, stressed, or annoyed.
- Man will not reconcile if the person who offended him is a person thought to be of bad character.
- Man is often only willing to be reconciled if the offending party craves forgiveness and makes the first move.

- Man is often only willing to be reconciled if the offending party will never again do the wrong.
- Man, when he does reconcile, does not lift the former offender to a place of high status and partnership.
- Man, when he is wronged, does not bear the entire penalty for the wrong that has been done.
- Man, when he attempts reconciliation, will not continue if he is rejected.
- Man will not restore an offender without a period of probation.
- Man will not love, adopt, honour, and associate with one who has wronged him. He does not wish the offender well.
- Man will not trust someone who has formerly wronged them.

What passes for forgiveness among men is nothing like the amazing forgiveness of God. Charles Spurgeon wrote: “Suppose that someone had grievously offended any one of you, and that he asked your forgiveness, do you not think that you would probably say to him, ‘Well, yes, I forgive you; but I - I - I - cannot forget it’? Ah! dear friends, that is a sort of forgiveness with one leg chopped off, it is a lame forgiveness, and is not worth much.” Jesus warns: *<<If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained>>* (John 20:23).

His children shall come trembling, I will return them to their homes describes the return of a remnant of God’s people from exile. God speaks of the ultimate restoration of Israel, an expression of his mercy to Ephraim. Some see this as the new nation of Israel established in 1947. Others see this as those whom God marks as his people in the final days: *<<And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel>>* (Revelation 7:4).

¹² Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
and the house of Israel with deceit;
but Judah still walks with God,
and is faithful to the Holy One.

^{12:1} Ephraim herds the wind,
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a treaty with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

Hosea 11:12-12:1

Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, but Judah still walks with God. God makes these promises knowing the present state of Israel. Although Judah is in a better place than Israel, God still makes the promises with full knowledge of their present state. Judah and the northern tribes, i.e. Ephraim, both suffered lapses in fidelity to the Lord, but Judah, unlike Ephraim, had some good kings, in particular, Hezekiah. One of the highest points in Judah's history was the victory over the Assyrians when Hezekiah was king; refer to 2 Kings Chapters 18-19, which was 20 years after Samaria had fallen.

Ephraim herds the wind. The idols and foreign alliances Israel trusts in are useless. They are like trying to feed on the wind, which will lead to destruction: *<<When it is transplanted, will it thrive? When the east wind strikes it, will it not utterly wither, wither on the bed where it grew?>>* (Ezekiel 17:10). Ephraim depends on what is elusive and unprofitable; wind is used elsewhere as an image this way: *<<Do you think that you can reprove words, as if the speech of the desperate were wind?>>* (Job 6:26), *<<He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again>>* (Psalm 78:39), *<<I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind>>* (Ecclesiastes 1:14), and: *<<You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. Then you shall rejoice in the Lord; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory>>* (Isaiah 41:16). Wind graphically describes the duplicity of both Israel and Judah's covenant making. Jesus uses the analogy of wind to portray the mysteries of the Spirit: *<<What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit'>>* (John 3:6-8).

They make a treaty with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt. Instead of trusting in the Lord, Israel trusted in deals and payoffs to the surrounding superpowers. It was foolish for them to think that Assyria or Egypt was more powerful or dependable than the Lord was. Oil to Egypt could refer to an inducement offered to Egypt for relief when Israel was paying tribute to Assyria.