

Love *and* Judgment: God’s Dilemma (Hosea)



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Hos. 7:11, 12; 10:11–13; Matt. 11:28–30; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; Hosea 14.*

Memory Text: “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (*Hosea 12:6, NIV*).

Key Thought: Hosea reveals more of God’s love for His wayward people.

A common way in which biblical authors talk about God’s love relationship with His people is by using metaphors. A metaphor conveys something profound about a lesser-known subject through something that is already known or familiar. Metaphors are symbols used to explain something other than themselves.

The two most commonly used biblical metaphors regarding God’s relationship with His people are husband-wife and parent-child metaphors. Last week we looked at the husband-wife metaphor. This week we will look into a few more of Hosea’s metaphors, the most dominant of which is the parent-child one.

Hosea used metaphors for the same reasons that Jesus taught in parables: First, to explain truths about God through the familiar things of life; second, to impress on people’s minds important spiritual principles that could be applied in everyday existence.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 13.*

Easily Deceived and Senseless

“ ‘Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them; I will pull them down like birds of the air. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them’ ” (*Hos. 7:11, 12, NIV*). Read these verses in context. What warning is being given here? What principle can we take from these verses for ourselves?

Ephraim was the name of the younger son of Joseph. Because Ephraim was the name of the principal tribe of the northern kingdom of Israel, the name is applied to the entire kingdom, just as the name Judah was applied to the kingdom in the south. In the above verses, Israel is compared to a senseless bird (*compare Jer. 5:21*), allowing itself to be an easy prey for the fowler’s net. In this context, her reliance on other nations for help was an act of rebellion against God.

Why? Because an alliance with the mighty Assyrian Empire or ambitious Egypt would require Israel to recognize the supremacy of the gods worshiped by those two superpowers (*see also Isa. 52:4, Lam. 5:1–6*). Going to them would mean, of necessity, turning away from the Lord. What they needed to do was return to the Lord, repent, obey His commandments, and put away their false gods. That was their only hope, not political alliances with pagans.

“The very position of Palestine exposed it to invasion by these two ancient empires. . . . The much-coveted prize for which these powerful empires fought was this highway that connected the rich watersheds of the Nile and the Euphrates. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah were caught in this international counterplay and squeezed between the two rivals. In desperation, without spiritual trust in her God, Israel fatuously appealed first to the one and then to the other for a support that could only turn into a snare to her own national well-being.” —*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 908.

It is so easy to seek human aid for our problems instead of seeking the Lord, is it not? Of course, the Lord can use human agents in answer to our prayers. How can we be sure that, in desperate situations and in need of help, we do not make the same mistake that Israel did here? How can we use human aid without, by necessity, turning away from the Lord?

A Trained Heifer

Read Hosea 10:11–13. What message is the Lord giving to His people here? How do we understand the phrase, “until he comes and showers righteousness on you?” (NIV).

In Hosea 10, God’s child, Ephraim, is compared to a trained heifer who loves to thresh grain because she can eat as she threshes. Thus, instead of being productive, Israel’s existence has become self-centered. When God yokes Israel to work in open fields as the nation should, righteousness and kindness will grow.

In Bible times, the yoke was an instrument of service. Young beasts of burden were trained to be docile by working first on the threshing floor (*Jer. 50:11*). While yoked, they simply would tread out corn with their feet. At the next stage, they pulled a threshing sledge over the corn (*2 Sam. 24:22, NIV*). This type of work prepared them for the more disciplined task of plowing a furrow in a field (*1 Kings 19:19, Jer. 4:3*). God had a similar plan in His training of Israel. He would put a yoke on Ephraim’s fair neck to make him work hard in the plowing and breaking up of the soil.

In Hosea 10:12 the prophet presents what the Lord desires Israel to be through obedience to His word. Righteousness and steadfast love are the gifts promised by God to His wife when the covenant is renewed (*Hos. 2:19*). If people sow righteousness, they will reap kindness in return. Only by searching for the Lord and His will can Israel be delivered from the coming punishment. The door of mercy is still open for possible repentance on the part of God’s chosen people.

The admonition to sow righteousness concerns people-to-people relationships; the search for God concerns the relationship between God and His people. The breaking up of the soil represents spiritual and social reform and renewal. The Lord and His people will work together in a mutual relationship to bring blessings back to the land. The results will be a glorious blossoming that will fill the whole earth (*Hos. 14:5–7*).

Read Christ’s invitation to take His yoke upon ourselves (*Matt. 11:28–30*). How can learning from Christ to be “gentle and humble in heart” (NIV) help us to find rest for our souls?

A Toddling Son

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. . . . I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them” (*Hos. 11:1, 3, NKJV*).

In these verses, Hosea is saying that the Lord’s way is like the tender care of a new parent. Just as a parent tenderly and patiently teaches a child to walk, taking it up by his hands to prevent its fall, so the Lord has cared for Israel right from the beginning. God, who loves and forgives, is the heart of Hosea’s message. Even when He applies discipline, He is deeply compassionate. His anger can be terrifying, but His mercy is beyond comprehension.

Read Deuteronomy 8:5, Proverbs 13:24, Hebrews 12:6, and Revelation 3:19. What is the one point that these verses all have in common? What comfort can we draw from these texts?

Through Moses, God informed the Egyptian king that Israel was His special child (*Exod. 4:22, 23*). Although all the nations of the earth, including Egypt, were God’s sons and daughters, the Hebrew nation was selected to be God’s firstborn son with special privileges. But along with those privileges came responsibilities. In the wilderness the Lord carried His people in the same way in which “a father carries his son” (*Deut. 1:31, NIV*). At times He disciplined them just like “a man disciplines his son” (*Deut. 8:5, NIV*).

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 151.

There is no question that any parent who loves his children will discipline them, and always for their own good. If flawed and fallen humans do this, how much more so can we trust in God’s love for us, even during times of trial?

For many of us, the issue is not about trusting God’s discipline. Rather, the struggle is knowing how to interpret the trials that come our way. How do we know if what we are going through is, indeed, God teaching us in the “school of sorrow” or if it is something else? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Compassion Stronger Than Anger

“How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath” (*Hos. 11:8, 9, NASB*).

This passage serves as a window into God’s heart: will God hand His rebellious son over to be stoned to death as required by law (*Deut. 21:18–21; see also Gen. 19:17–23*)? What an amazing insight into both God’s own suffering due to human sin and His desire to save us.

Even though sinful Israel deserved total destruction, the Lord in His enduring mercy continues to love His people while striving for their repentance.

In Abraham’s time there were five cities situated in the Jordan Valley southeast of the Dead Sea (*Gen. 14:8*). Known as “the cities of the plain,” they were Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. Of these, only Zoar was not destroyed. The names of the other four became proverbial for the total destruction that came upon them due to their wicked ways and unwillingness to repent (*Deut. 29:23*). It was to some of these cities that Hosea was referring in the above verses.

Hosea 11 teaches that God’s ways transcend those of sinful humanity. He will not let bitterness govern His decisions. God’s love seeks to bring healing, health, and restoration to His people. The purpose of divine discipline is to correct, amend, and reconcile, not to destroy and avenge. Many people, even professed Christians, do not understand that aspect of God but, instead, see Him as vengeful, angry, and just looking to find fault in order to punish them for their sins. Even worse, some believe that He burns the lost in hell for eternity. That, however, is not the picture of God presented here.

Read Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 2:24, and Galatians 3:13. How do these texts, even more than the ones we see in Hosea, reveal the extent of God’s love for humanity?

Healed, Loved, and Nurtured

Some ancient scholars viewed the Lord, as revealed in the Old Testament, as harsh and unforgiving, in contrast to Jesus, as revealed in the New. Why is that such a wrong conclusion? How does the message of Hosea 14 help to show just how wrong that conclusion is? What does this chapter reveal about God's character and love for His people?

The last chapter of Hosea is a fitting climax to the message proclaimed by the prophet. It reaffirms the promise that God's salvation will have the last word. The chapter opens with one more call to turn away from all iniquity. In bidding the people to return to God, the prophet supplies the actual words that they should say in worship. Their request should be that God take away the guilt that made them stumble. They should also renounce their dependence on the other nations and totally reject idolatry. In Bible times no person was supposed to appear before the Lord empty-handed (*Exod. 23:15*). So, beyond bringing an animal sacrifice, the people are told to bring words of genuine repentance as their thanksgiving offering.

Then, following a penitential confession on the people's part, God responds with a series of promises. The foremost of these is the healing of the people's maladies by the divine Physician. God's renewed relationship with Israel is likened to the dew that provides the only moisture available to flowers and trees during the long and dry summer season in Palestine. It is also linked to the olive tree, which is considered especially valuable, a sort of crown of the fruit trees. Its foliage provides shade, and freshness and its oil is used as food, skin lotion, and as fuel for lights. Additionally, the great cedars of Lebanon are considered the most useful of the large-growth trees in the lands of the Bible. Their highly prized lumber serves for the construction of temples and royal palaces (*1 Kings 6:9, 10*). The roots planted by God will produce such an abundance of fresh plants that Israel will become a garden full of blessings for the whole world.

Read the last verse of the chapter. What conditions are required for all these promises to be fulfilled? Why is it no different for us today, in our role as Seventh-day Adventists?

Further Study: Compare the following two quotations with the messages presented in Hosea 7–14.

“Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. . . . The principles of God’s government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 34.

“Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. . . . Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. Even in the darkest hours some would remain true to their divine Ruler and in the midst of idolatry would live blameless in the sight of a holy God. These faithful ones were numbered among the goodly remnant through whom the eternal purpose of Jehovah was finally to be fulfilled.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 108.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It has been suggested that through Hosea’s life and ministry, God’s word to Israel had in a sense “become flesh.” How is this idea only a small reflection of the great truth about the humanity of Jesus? See *John 1:14*.
- 2 Ancient Israel did not depart from God overnight. Instead, its apostasy was a gradual process. Prepare to share with your class members some of the ways in which one can remain faithful to God’s eternal principles in a constantly changing world.
- 3 Some people believe that the gospel message about God’s great love and salvation is presented clearly only in the New Testament and not in the Old. What is wrong with that idea?
- 4 In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- 5 The Old Testament was the Bible that Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul read. Look into the New Testament quotations from Hosea that are found in Matthew 9:13 and Romans 9:25, 26. How did Jesus and Paul use the gospel message in Hosea to proclaim truth to us?

The Secondhand Church

Pamela Obero sat beside her mud house in Kenya and listened to the preacher's sermon over the loudspeaker. She was curious about the Seventh-day Adventist meetings being held on a nearby vacant lot, even though she belonged to another church.

The messages touched Pamela's heart, and at times she felt that the speaker talked directly to her. So, on Sabbath morning she took her five children to the meetings instead of to her own church. When the pastor invited those who wanted special prayer to come forward, Pamela took her children to the front. Her husband had died, and she was the sole support of her family. Life was difficult.

Pamela had been an ardent member of the charismatic church to which she belonged. She had donated the land on which the church members built their mud-brick house of worship. So, when she did not attend church for three weeks, some church members visited and asked why she was no longer attending. "I have found truth that I never knew before," she told them simply. "And I am learning how to properly raise my family."

Pamela and her children joined the nearest Seventh-day Adventist church, which was three miles (five kilometers) from her home. Then she learned that the charismatic church to which she had belonged had abandoned the mud-brick church they had built on her land. Pamela invited the church leaders to hold small-group worship services in the abandoned building, and the church accepted her offer.

When Pamela's friends from her former church asked her questions about why she had left, she shared with them new truths she had learned and invited them to worship in the new Seventh-day Adventist church—their former building. So far three of her friends have joined the Seventh-day Adventist group that worships in the mud-brick church.

The little congregation of 25 met in the mud-brick church for a year before it deteriorated to where it was no longer safe. The church members decided to rebuild with more permanent materials.

Pamela makes and sells porridge and buns to provide for her children. She is poor, but she shares with those in need when she can. When her friends laugh at her poor house, she smiles and tells them, "My God is my husband and my provider. He is so good to my family; I cannot thank Him enough."

Your mission offerings reach searching hearts like Pamela's around the world. Thank you.

PAMELA OBERO *shares her faith in Kendu Bay, Kenya.*