

Hosea 11:1-12
The Covenant Love of God and the Idolatry of His People

I. Introduction

A. Structure of 4:1-14:9:¹

1. 4:1-6:3 — Evidence of ignorance of God and statement of hope
2. **6:4-11:11 — Evidence of disloyalty to God and statement of hope**
3. 11:12-14:9 — Evidence of faithlessness to God and statement of hope

B. Up to chapter 11 we've seen a clear argument presented to Israel of their sin and necessary judgment. Most recently we've seen that their decision to worship idols has led to infertility in the land as well as the womb. **Yahweh is making it very clear that He is LORD of the ground and the womb, and He is bigger than Baal.**

II. 1-4 —Yahweh's love for His idolatrous people.

A. **What NT passage does verse 1 remind you of?**

Matthew 2:15, where Matthew likely saw Jesus as a type of Israel, a new Israel. Where Israel failed by serving the gods of the land, Jesus would be successful by perfectly obeying the law. The sense of this verse should direct us back to 9:10 where we see Yahweh's favorable experience with His people when He first found them. **There is also a change of metaphor here, instead of referring to Israel as His unfaithful wife, Yahweh calls Israel His Son.**

B. 2 — This section shows that despite all that Yahweh had done for His people, they turned away. The more He called the more they went away. It provides a picture of the hardness of their hearts despite the love of Yahweh for them. Instead of responding with repentance to the many calls, Israel traveled further into sin and away from Yahweh.

C. 3-4 — This section provides a vivid portrayal of Yahweh's love for Israel. From the beginning of Israel's history, Yahweh was the one who lead them along as a young child, took care of them, healed them, fed them, and so much more. **In verse 4 the metaphor changes to that of an animal**, and expresses the gentle way that Yahweh dealt with his people.² Yahweh gently, and graciously took care of them. That He "bent down to them and fed them," expresses His love for His people.

Verse 4 could be alluding to their freedom from slavery to Egypt and Yahweh's provision of manna in the wilderness.³

Consider this for a moment. The transcendent God knelt down to feed a farm animal. There was nothing about Israel that drew God to them outside of His love for them and His covenant with Abraham (see

¹ Michael Barrett, 19.

² There is question about the phrase, "cords of kindness." The term refers more directly to "man" but may allude to that of humanness or something of that sort. Regardless of definition, the point is clear, gentleness and love are the focal point of this verse.

³ Gary Smith, 161.

Deut 7:6ff). Here we see His kindness to them by stooping down to feed them.

1. **Do you think that Israel had this in the back of their minds as they pursued spiritual adultery?**
2. **What are the implications then for Christians today? How important is it that we focus in on the love that God has shown us?**

III.5-7 — The result of their stubborn hearts

- A. 5 — Israel would not go to Egypt for captivity, but to Assyria.⁴ Egypt was a picture of captivity, though it would not be the place they would end up in exile. Because they would not return to Yahweh they would be sold to Assyria and be under the rule of a foreign king.

In light of the gentle and gracious love of Yahweh for His people, it seems absurd that they would not turn back to Him.

- B. 6⁵ — The result of Israel’s stubborn heart is destruction. Assyria’s sword would flash in the city and destroy it. Judgment is coming as a result of them depending on their own counsels. We’ve seen this in other places as well (10:13). Their trust in themselves was manifested in their pursuit of idolatry, their dependence on military strength, and their repeated attempts to be saved by foreign kings.
- C. 7 — They are bent on turning away from me... though they call out to the Most High. There are three possible translations/understandings of this verse.
1. Some (like our translations) say it means God. In other words, at one point they would not turn toward God, then in the next moment they seek him. But in the end He will not raise them up.
 2. The second group says it means Baal. They are turning to Baal for help yet he cannot raise them up.⁶
 3. Garrett suggests that the phrase **“God on High” is a generic title they gave to Yahweh that could include other gods as well.** In other words, this phrase shows their syncretism.⁷ This seems to do the best justice to the verse. We talked about this in chapter 2:16. Hosea didn’t use the term “Yahweh,” nor did he use the term “Baal,” so this generic name is ambiguous. **The point then, Baal can’t help them, and Yahweh will not.**

⁴ NET says “They will return to Egypt.” However, the ESV, NIV, NASB seem to have the best translation.

⁵ It is difficult to determine which translation is best for *bdd*. Garrett suggests, “boast.” McComiskey suggests, “bars” (traditional position), Stuart suggests, “prophets. Essentially, every position. For simplicities sake, we will take the traditional position. **Destruction is the obvious goal in the passage...what is destroyed is less important.**

⁶ “Most High” is the same term used in 7:16 - there it seems to represent Baal.

⁷ Garrett, 227.

IV. 8-9 — As one commentator said, these verses describe the love that Yahweh has for His people, as if it was welling up in His heart.

- A. To help us through some theological challenges that may arise, Garrett writes, *“While accepting the fact that God transcends our metaphors and that theological doctrines about the impassability⁸ and foreknowledge of God should never be jettisoned, texts such as this should be allowed to speak to us in the power of their raw emotion. It is precisely in texts such as this that the love of God becomes a vivid reality and not a barren abstraction.”*⁹

It might be easy for us to read these verses and to wonder if God is wringing His hands trying to determine what to do. Or that He is regretting decisions He has already made to bring judgment, and may in fact change His mind.

This is untrue. Hose is providing for us a window into the Love that God has for His people. His ultimate desire is that they would repent and turn back to Him. Though He doesn't want to bring judgment, it is something He knows is best for His people.

- B. Zeboiim and Admah were a part of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁰ The same destruction that fell on them is what would take place with Israel. In fact, Deuteronomy 29:23 explains the destruction of these two towns in the context of the curses associated with those who worship other gods.
- C. 9 — Unlike with Sodom and Gomorrah, Yahweh would not completely destroy His people.¹¹ They would face judgment because they broke the covenant, but it would not be to the same degree as what was seen in Gen 19. Israel would be shown mercy, a remnant would remain, and they would return to the land. The basis for this mercy is the character of God. Though He is holy and set apart (and even though His holiness leads to judgment on those who are not holy), Yahweh reminds us that he is God and not a man. In other words, He is not going to annihilate his people as a foreign king might, or respond as a man would. Yahweh will show His people mercy.

1. **What would be your response to Israel's repeated sin if you were God?** Some of us may have thought about this at different times in our lives, “what would I do if I was God?” “Would I show Israel mercy or would I wipe them off the face of the earth and be done with them?” “Would I give people the chance to curse my name and use my precious gifts for sin, and let them live?” “Or would I destroy them at the first sign of rebellion?”

⁸ Wayne Grudem suggests that the doctrine of impassibility is not biblical. The doctrine of impassibility teaches that God does not have emotions. However, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that God does have emotions, just not sinful ones. See Grudem, 165-166.

⁹ Ibid, 227.

¹⁰ See Gen 14:2; 19; Deut 29:23.

¹¹ McComiskey is helpful when he notes that this does not mean that God won't send them into exile. Instead, he just means that he will not let his wrath go to its furthest extent with Israel and wipe them out completely. 192.

2. **As we consider how Yahweh loves His people, and treats them with compassion and mercy despite their sin, what are some practical implications for us as Christians?**

V. 10-11 — Hosea allude to two past analogies — both highlight Israel’s future restoration

- A. First, of Yahweh being a young lion who gets his prey. Instead of tearing Israel in pieces as we saw in 5:14, in 11:10 the roar of the lion will bring them back, presumably from exile (thus the reference to “from the west”). The surprise here is that instead of fleeing in fear of the roar of a lion, the people come back. They will come back trembling—and we might assume—with a proper fear of Yahweh.
- B. Second, in verse 11 we see another picture of the dove that was elsewhere described as ignorant. This dove will return to Yahweh, instead of turning to Assyria. The conclusion then is that Yahweh will deal with Israel with compassion in the future. Judgment will come, but compassion will follow. He will bring them back to their homes.

VI. Conclusion

Throughout this section of the book (6:4-11:11), we’ve seen the absence of Israel’s love (*hesed*) for Yahweh. There could not have been a more fitting way to conclude this section than by demonstrating the love that Yahweh has for His people, despite their sin.

VII. Application

- A. **How often do you spend time considering love of God?**
- B. **We’ve observed in this passage how Yahweh has dealt with His wayward people. How might God’s example instruct us as we relate to those who are in our lives?**