

The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

LESSON
TWO

REVELATIONS FOR THE
WISE



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The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea

Lesson Two

Revelations for the Wise

INTRODUCTION

Difficult experiences in life often teach us a lot of wisdom. And the insights we learn about God, ourselves and the world can be priceless to those around us as they face their own trials. This was certainly true for the prophet Hosea. He received revelations from God in challenging circumstances over many decades. And in his later years, the Holy Spirit inspired him to compile these revelations to offer wisdom to ancient Israel and Judah as they faced some serious trials.

This is the second lesson in our series on *The Prophetic Wisdom of Hosea*, and we've entitled it "Revelations for the Wise." In this lesson, we'll see how Hosea designed his book, from beginning to end, to impart wisdom to God's ancient people.

In our previous lesson, we learned that the book of Hosea begins with a title in 1:1 that introduces the full timeline of Hosea's ministry. And it ends with a closure in 14:9 that calls Hosea's readers to gain wisdom from his prophecies. Between these verses, the body of Hosea consists of three main divisions. The first division, in 1:2–3:5, focuses on both judgment and hope from God. The second division, in 4:1–9:9, looks more closely at God's unfolding judgment against his people. And the third division, in 9:10–14:8, returns to the unfolding hope God revealed through Hosea's prophecies. We also summarized the overarching purpose of Hosea's book in this way:

The book of Hosea called the leaders of Judah to gain wisdom from what God had revealed throughout Hosea's ministry as they faced the challenges of Sennacherib's invasion.

As this summary points out, the leaders of Judah desperately needed wisdom. God threatened devastating judgment against Judah during, or possibly just after, Sennacherib's invasion in the days of King Hezekiah. And Hosea's book called Judah's leaders to gain discernment from what God had revealed throughout Hosea's ministry so they could guide God's people in these trying times.

To explore how Hosea fulfilled this purpose, we'll point to the revelations for the wise that Hosea included in each major division of his book. We'll start with his prophecies of judgment and hope in the first division. Then, we'll consider his announcements of unfolding judgment in the second division. And finally, we'll explore his revelations of unfolding hope in the third division. Let's look first at insights disclosed in Hosea's prophecies of judgment and hope.

JUDGMENT AND HOPE

You'll recall that the first division of Hosea, in 1:2–3:5, consists of prophecies Hosea received in northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. As we learned in our previous lesson, these were prophecies about Assyria's rise to prominence in 744 B.C. In this lesson, we'll see that Hosea's presentation of these early revelations carefully balanced every threat of God's judgment with hopeful reassurances that God would still bless his people in the future.

By the time Hosea wrote his book, the kingdom of Israel had fallen under God's severe judgment, and the threat of judgment had come against Judah as well. These harsh realities were disappointing and confusing to the leaders of Judah. What was God doing? What should they believe about the future? In the first three chapters of his book, Hosea began to provide the leaders of Judah with wisdom as they dealt with these kinds of questions.

As we look at Hosea's chapters on judgment and hope from God, we'll begin with their original meaning — their significance for those who first received his book. Then, we'll explore the modern application of these chapters. Let's start with Hosea's original meaning for our book's first audience.

ORIGINAL MEANING

If Hosea had summarized the revelations he offered in the first division of his book, he might have said something like this:

After a period of judgment, Israel will receive God's blessings in the latter days through reunification with Judah and submission to David's house.

On the one hand, Hosea's prophecies taught that God's blessings would come to the northern tribes of Israel after they'd endured a period of judgment. But on the other hand, they also taught that God would pour out these blessings in the latter days through Israel's reunification with Judah and their submission to David's house.

We'll look at the original meaning of this division in two steps. First, Hosea disclosed God's plan that Israel would receive God's blessings after a period of judgment. Second, Hosea clarified that those blessings would come *through* Judah. Let's explore both of these steps, beginning with Hosea's teaching that God's blessings would come to Israel after a time of judgment.

Blessings After Judgment

Hosea began this division with a personal account of his earlier family experiences in 1:2–2:1.

Earlier Family Experiences. This section starts with a family narrative in 1:2-9. In verses 2, 3, God commanded Hosea to marry Gomer, “a wife” — or woman — “of whoredom.” This description indicates that Gomer was one of the many prostitutes who served in Israel’s fertility worship centers. Her way of life cast a dark shadow over Hosea’s marriage. But more than this, their marriage symbolized that God had joined himself, through covenant, with an unfaithful people — the people of Israel.

Then, in verses 4-9, God commanded Hosea to give his children specific names that revealed Israel’s condition before God. Hosea’s first son was named Jezreel; 2 Kings 10 explains that Jeroboam II’s ancestor, King Jehu, had established his dynasty with horrific violence at Jezreel. Naming Hosea’s first son Jezreel revealed that violent judgment was soon to come to Israel. Hosea’s second child, a daughter, was named Lo-Ruhamah, which may be translated “not loved,” or “no mercy.” This name indicated that God was going to stop showing love and mercy to the kingdom of Israel. Finally, God commanded Hosea to name his third child Lo-Ammi, which means “not my people.” This son’s name revealed that, for a period of time, God would treat Israel as if it were a Gentile nation under his wrath.

Hosea’s earlier family experiences revealed the terrible judgment that was coming to Israel. But, Hosea immediately balanced these words of judgment with some divinely-inspired hopeful prophetic reflections in 1:10–2:1. Here, he declared that, despite the devastation that was coming against Israel, God would still fulfill the promises he’d made to Abraham in Genesis 13, 22. Listen to Hosea 1:10 where Hosea announced:

The children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God” (Hosea 1:10).

We find in the prophetic books that sometimes the Lord — in order to emphasize his determination to fulfill his promises — used symbols. He made use of symbolic actions. So, when he asked Hosea to marry a prostitute, what God wanted was to illustrate vividly the infidelity of his people, how his people had acted like an adulterous woman — even more, like a prostitute — going after other gods, the gods of other nations. But by means of the prophet Hosea, he showed that, in spite of the prostitutions of his people, the infidelity of his people, he remained faithful to his covenant.

— Dr. David Correa, translation

Following this balanced account of his earlier family experiences, Hosea turned to God’s first lawsuit in his book, in 2:2-23.

God’s Lawsuit. As we usually expect with prophetic lawsuits, in 2:2-13, God declared in the court of heaven that northern Israel was going to suffer his curses. Like

Gomer and her worship prostitution, the Israelites had been unfaithful to God, and God was going to curse them through the rise of the Assyrian Empire. But unlike most divine lawsuits, this lawsuit didn't end with curses from God. On the contrary, in verses 14-23 God also spoke of blessings that would come after Israel's judgment. Listen to God's hopeful words in 2:18:

I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18).

Here we see that God expressed the certainty of a grand future after judgment by promising to make a covenant with Israel — a covenant that later prophets also predicted. Jeremiah 31:31 speaks of this covenant as a “new covenant.” And Isaiah 54:10, and Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26 all refer to it as a “covenant of peace.”

Here, Hosea's prophecy focused on how God's blessings would restore nature — “the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.” And God also promised the cessation of violence from Assyria. He would “abolish the bow, the sword and war” and Israel would “lie down in safety.”

After recording how judgment and hope were revealed in his earlier family experiences and in God's first lawsuit, Hosea turned to an account of his later family experiences in 3:1-5.

Later Family Experiences. Hosea 3 begins with an autobiographical family narrative in verses 1-3. Gomer, we learn, had returned to worship prostitution. But God commanded Hosea in verse 1 to “Go again [to Gomer], love a woman who is ... an adulteress.” Hosea obeyed, but in verse 3, he told Gomer that she was to be without a man “for many days.” Still, Hosea was careful to balance these words of judgment with a second set of divinely inspired hopeful prophetic reflections. In 3:4-5, we read this:

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel ... shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness (Hosea 3:4-5).

As this passage indicates, Gomer's time without a man symbolized that Israel would have to endure a long period of devastation, “without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.” But once again, Hosea stressed the hopeful outlook that after this judgment ended, Israel would receive God's “goodness” or blessings.

Now that we've seen how the original meaning of the first division emphasized God's blessings after a period of judgment, let's explore the revelation that these future blessings would come through Judah.

Blessings Through Judah

You'll recall that during the first stage of Hosea's ministry, Uzziah the king of Judah was faithful to God. So, while God pronounced judgments on the northern kingdom of Israel at this time, he responded quite differently to the southern kingdom. In 1:7, he said, "I will have mercy on the house of Judah." But as we're about to see, Hosea's prophecies in this first division had much more than this to say about Judah. Listen to the second part of Hosea's revelations from the first division. Hosea taught Judah's leaders that:

... Israel will receive God's blessings in the latter days through reunification with Judah and submission to David's house.

To understand why Hosea focused his revelations on God's blessings coming through Judah, we need to review three Old Testament themes that shaped Hosea's prophecies. In the first place, from as early as the patriarchal period, the Old Testament stressed the importance of the unity of the 12 tribes of Israel. The book of Genesis indicates this ideal, particularly in the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers. And the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Samuel also promote the unity of all Israel. Of course, Hosea began his ministry when the tribes of Israel and Judah were divided and at odds with each other. But in line with these earlier biblical ideals, Hosea stressed that God's future blessings for Israel would require reunification of the 12 tribes.

In the second place, Hosea also drew from the Old Testament theme of submission to David's house. Several early biblical books, especially Judges, Samuel and Kings, as well as a number of early Psalms, confirm that David's house — the royal line of Judah — was to be the permanent dynasty over all of God's people. Like the first theme, this theme is rooted in the story of Joseph and his brothers. In Genesis 49:10, the patriarch Jacob prophesied over his sons and predicted that "the scepter" — a symbol of royal authority — "shall not depart from Judah." So, at a time when the northern tribes rejected the authority of David's throne, Hosea stressed that Israel's future blessings would require their renewed submission to the rule of David's house.

In the third place, to grasp Hosea's hopeful words about blessings through Judah, it's also important to keep in mind God's ultimate goal for all of history. As many Old Testament historical books and the Psalms indicate, the *reason* God's people were to be unified under David's house was, ultimately, to spread God's kingdom to the ends of the earth. As before, we can see this theme as early as the story of Joseph and his brothers. When Jacob prophesied over his son Judah in Genesis 49:10, he not only said, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah," he also said, "to him shall be the obedience of the peoples," or nations, as it may be translated.

In the end, the twelve tribes of Israel, united under the rule of Judah's king, will spread God's reign to the whole world. And Hosea's earliest prophecies about Judah promoted this glorious vision of a future. In light of this background, listen to Hosea 1:11 and the way Hosea touched on these themes:

The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel (Hosea 1:11).

Here Hosea predicted that “the day of Jezreel” — the violence Assyria was going to bring against northern Israel — would be “great.” But after this judgment from God, “The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together” into one reunified nation. And they will “appoint for themselves one head,” or king. And in 3:5, Hosea elaborated on these Old Testament outlooks in this way:

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5).

As we see here, “Afterward” — after Israel’s time of judgment — “the children of Israel shall ... seek” not only “the Lord their God,” but also “David their king.” And notice that Hosea said these events would occur “in the latter days.” This phrase comes from the Hebrew expression *b’achariyt hayyamim* (בְּאַחֲרֵי־יְמֵי־ם). In other passages, this and similar phrases are simply translated “in the future.” But here, it’s rightly translated “in the latter days” — a reference to the culmination of history, after the exile of God’s people, when God’s purposes will be fulfilled.

As we’ve noted in other series, a number of Old Testament prophets drew the expression “the latter days” from Deuteronomy 4:25-31. In these verses, Moses warned God’s people that if they flagrantly violated God’s covenant, then God would give them over to their enemies and exile them from the Promised Land. But in verse 30, Moses reassured God’s people that, “in the latter days,” they would repent, and their exile would be over. In accordance with Moses’ predictions, Hosea prophesied that northern Israel would suffer severely under God’s judgment. But, as we’ve just seen, he also reaffirmed that they would repent, reunite with Judah, and submit to David’s house. And all of this would bring about the blessings of the latter days, when history would reach its grand finale, and God’s kingdom would spread throughout the world.

There are times where you see the phrase “latter days” used, say, in the Pentateuch. One example is at the end of Deuteronomy 4... In that context, what Moses is warning Israel about, as they’re about to enter into the Promised Land, that when they get into the Promised Land, he says that if they disobey God and don’t follow what’s expected in the Sinai covenant, that ultimately they could get kicked out of the Promised Land and sent into exile. So, what Moses is warning or speaking about is once they’ve been kicked out of the land, are in exile due to disobedience, what he says though, is there’s still hope for those people who have been kicked out of the land, that in the “latter days” they can turn to God and call upon him and bring them back. And of course this is a wonderful glimpse of our God who is willing to not give up on his people, but bring them back and restore them, which

lays a great theological basis for who God is — a God who restores, a God who redeems even after sin. That provides a basis for understanding God’s later acts in the person of Jesus Christ and what he will do in the end ultimately.

— Andrew Abernethy, Ph.D.

Now, it’s easy to see why Hosea *first* delivered these early prophecies of judgment and hope in northern Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. God called him to warn Israel of the divine judgment that was coming and to urge them to seek God’s mercy. And even though northern Israel ignored Hosea’s prophecies and suffered God’s judgment, Hosea’s *purpose* for delivering these warnings was clear.

But why did Hosea include these balanced prophecies of judgment and hope decades later when he composed his book in *Judah*? What did he hope to accomplish? Well, for one, these early prophecies offered Judah’s leaders in Hezekiah’s day a solid foundation for understanding the wisdom of Hosea’s entire book. Just as Israel had, before them, Judah was now facing God’s judgment, and they needed the revelations found in Hosea’s book to guide them. But Hosea also wrote this first division of his book to remind Judah of God’s ultimate plan for his people. No matter what had happened, or was still to happen, there was only one way that God’s blessings in the latter days would unfold. One of David’s sons would reunite the nation and lead both Israel and Judah into God’s grand blessings.

We should note that according to 2 Chronicles 30, early in his reign, Hezekiah attempted to reunite Israel and Judah under his rule as a son of David. But later on, he turned away from God, and his attempt failed. Israel remained in disarray, and Judah fell under God’s judgment, still awaiting the blessings that were to come “in the latter days.”

Having considered the original meaning of Hosea’s opening, balanced presentation of judgment and hope, let’s turn to the modern application of this division of our book.

MODERN APPLICATION

Christians have applied the book of Hosea to their lives in a variety of ways. But sadly, many of us approach our applications rather haphazardly. We simply read along until we find some relatively minor theological or moral principle that easily fits with other things we believe as followers of Christ. Now, the Holy Spirit usually keeps us from missing the mark too badly as we focus on these bits and pieces. But we want to take a different approach by focusing on the main themes that appear in Hosea’s early prophecies of judgment and hope.

As we approach the modern application of Hosea’s first division, we’ll examine two crucial connections between this part of the book and the New Testament. First, what does the New Testament teach about the church as the bride of Christ? And second, what does it teach about the latter days in Christ? Consider first how the New Testament outlook on the bride of Christ connects our lives with Hosea’s day.

Bride of Christ

In Hosea's first three chapters, the story of Hosea's marriage to Gomer symbolizes God's relationship with his Old Testament people, Israel and Judah. Hosea and Gomer were bound together by their marital covenant; God and his people were bound together by God's covenant. Gomer broke her covenant with Hosea; Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God. Hosea renewed his love and marital covenant with Gomer; God promised to renew his love and covenant with his people in the latter days. These parallels intentionally compared God's relationship with Israel and Judah to human marriage.

Other prophets also referred to God's relationship with Israel and Judah as a marriage along similar, although less personal, lines. We see this in passages like Isaiah 62:5 and Jeremiah 2:2, 32; 31:32.

The New Testament builds on this Old Testament theme by speaking of the church as the bride of Christ, much like Hosea presented God as the husband of Israel and Judah. This metaphor appears in passages like 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-33, Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9.

This New Testament perspective reflects the fact that the Christian church grew out of the people of God in the Old Testament. Throughout biblical history God has had only one bride. So Christ's relationship with the Christian church isn't completely new. Rather, it's an extension of God's relationship with his people in the Old Testament. Of course, there are many more Gentiles in the New Testament church. But New Testament authors made it clear that, even in the Old Testament, Gentiles could become part of the people of God by being adopted or grafted into the family of Abraham. For this reason, Hosea's revelations for God's Old Testament bride, Israel and Judah, apply to us as the bride of Christ, no matter what our natural ethnicity may be.

When we speak of the church in the New Testament, it's important to realize that it's not totally brand new; it's rooted back in terms of God's redemptive purposes with Israel of old. God has one people, one plan, that from all eternity he has had, and then he has worked it out in redemptive history and unfolded it before us... The Old Testament believer believed in God's promises, covenantal promises that looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. The church now, in light of his coming, believes in him with greater understanding and greater clarity, but the same promise, the same Redeemer; we are all one in that. We are as one people of God throughout the ages. Yet, obviously in the New Testament there are some differences. There's the fulfillment that has taken place. There's the greater understanding. There is the whole community that are comprised of those who are regenerate and those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must not minimize the continuity, the sameness of the people of God of Old, of the church in the New. We must not so separate Israel and the true people of God in terms of believers in the Old from the church. And remembering that there is one people, one

plan, and that is still being worked out. And in the new heaven, new earth, when Christ comes again and consummates all things, both Jew and Gentile, those who are faith believers in the Old Testament, the true church comprised of Jew, Gentile, and all the nations, are those that will bow before the knee of the Lord Jesus Christ and give him praises for all eternity.

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In our modern application of Hosea’s first division, we’ve seen the connection between Hosea and ourselves as the bride of Christ. Now, let’s consider how Hosea’s hopes for the future of God’s bride are fulfilled in the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

In the first division of his book, Hosea affirmed the hope that after a period of judgment God would pour out great blessings on Israel and Judah. And he made it clear that this would occur “in the latter days.” But because God’s people continued to rebel, God’s judgment remained on them for more than 700 years. Still, despite God’s prolonged discipline, Jesus and his first century apostles and prophets never gave up on Hosea’s hopeful prophecies about the latter days. Rather, time and again, New Testament authors identified the entire New Testament age — the age of the Christian church — as “the latter days,” using the Greek term *eschatos* (ἔσχατος). This is the term from which we get our theological expression “eschatology.” Put simply, New Testament authors taught that Jesus is the great son of David who fulfills Hosea’s prophecies about the eschatological or “latter” days.

But, as we’ve seen in other series, the New Testament also teaches that God’s latter day blessings for his bride are unfolding in three stages. The first stage was the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom when Jesus established the foundation of the church in his first advent and in the ministries of his apostles and prophets. The second stage is the continuation of Christ’s kingdom throughout church history. And the third stage will be the final consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns in glory and makes all things new.

As followers of Christ, we must apply Hosea’s early prophecies of judgment and hope in the light of all three of these stages of Christ’s kingdom. First, the inauguration of the latter days, in Christ’s first advent, sets the stage for the fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecies. Through faith in Christ — his death, resurrection and ascension — men, women and children become part of the church. In this way, they are betrothed, or securely promised, to Christ. As the apostle Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:2, “I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” So, in the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom, the hope Hosea presented to God’s bride for the latter days began to be fulfilled in the church, the bride of Christ.

The New Testament gospels emphasize that Jesus himself began to fulfill Hosea’s latter day hopes for God’s bride during his earthly ministry. Jesus called a remnant of

followers for God's kingdom out of Judah, but he *also* gathered followers from northern Israel, especially from around the Sea of Galilee. By creating his church out of faithful followers from both regions, Jesus began reunifying Israel and Judah under his rule as David's son.

And more than this, the mission Jesus established for his apostles and prophets in Acts 1:8 also corresponds with Hosea's latter day expectations. Christ's reunification of Israel and Judah under the house of David was only part of God's plan. To fulfill God's grand goal for the latter days, Jesus' apostles were to be his witnesses, not only in the territories of Israel and Judah, but also "to the end of the earth." This is why, in 1 Peter 2:10, the apostle Peter alluded to the first two chapters of Hosea when he described the early church — a church consisting of Judahites, northern Israelites and Gentiles. Peter wrote:

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:10).

The apostle Paul did much the same in Romans 9:25, 26 when he referred to the first two chapters of Hosea to explain how God incorporated both Jews and Gentiles in the Christian church. These passages demonstrate that the betrothal of the church to Christ throughout the world is the beginning of the fulfillment of Hosea's hopes for the latter days.

Second, Hosea's revelations are being fulfilled for the bride of Christ during the continuation of the latter days throughout church history. As Christ rules from heaven, he also continues to sanctify his bride on earth. This is why Paul instructed husbands to be like Christ, sacrificing themselves for their wives. As he put it in Ephesians 5:26, 27, Christ died for his bride "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself ... holy and without blemish."

Throughout church history, God has continued to form his bride as one people from Judah and Israel and to unite them with Gentiles from all over the world. And he has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit as a down payment guaranteeing the wondrous blessings we will receive at the fulfillment of the latter days. In union with the Holy Spirit, we've been given the grand privilege of spreading God's kingdom by proclaiming the gospel, or good news, that the latter days have come in Christ. And as we do this, we get to see firsthand how Hosea's prophecies are being fulfilled. Jews and Gentiles throughout the world enter the blessings of the latter days by seeking the Lord, uniting with God's people, submitting to David's great son, Jesus, and spreading God's kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Third, the revelations in Hosea's first division also call us to live today in the light of our ultimate hope for the consummation of Christ's kingdom. When Christ returns, he'll bring everlasting judgment on all who don't believe in him. But the New Testament gives us a compelling and glorious vision of what it will be like for Christ's bride when Hosea's hope for the future is completely fulfilled.

There is creation, there was a fall, there is redemption in Christ, and there will be consummation. History is coming to a close. God is going to wrap things up. All things that are wrong will be set right. And Christ has promised that he would return. He says in John 14 that he goes to prepare a place for us, and that if he goes and prepares a place for us, he'll return and receive us unto himself. Christ is also going to return to judge the living and the dead... There are a number of reasons that the return of Christ is important, not the least of which is that the return of Christ is sort of the consummation of the resurrection of Christ. He is risen; he is risen indeed. But he is risen that he might come again. And this is what we say in the Lord's Supper, right? "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

— Dr. Voddie Baucham, Jr.

In Revelation 19:7, 8, the apostle John described the consummation at Christ's return as a great wedding feast. Listen to John's words:

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure (Revelation 19:7, 8).

Hosea's hope for blessings after judgment in the latter days will be completely fulfilled when God's bride enters into the new creation. And believers from Judah, from the northern tribes of Israel, and from every nation on earth will fill the new creation. So, Hosea's earliest prophecies of judgment and hope should compel us to maintain our hope for our glorious future as the bride of Christ. And we should devote ourselves gladly to spreading God's great latter day blessings throughout the world until Jesus returns in glory.

One of the ways to think about the time that Christians find ourselves now living in, that is to say, the interval of unknown length between the first coming of Christ and his second coming, is to refer to that as — the entire period — as the "last days"... To us it seems strange. Why didn't God just accomplish salvation all at once, completely renew the earth in every way at Christ's first coming? The answer is, we don't know; we're not God. He gets to decide. But as we wait for Christ's return in glory and power, new things have started. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon all Christians in a newer and more powerful way. God is doing new things in Jesus, sending the mission of his good news more energetically to all the nations than ever he had before. So again, God is doing new things. So, even though we await the fullness of what God will do in Jesus for his whole world and for the human race and for all who trust in him, even now, there's the

**paradox of: the end has begun, but it hasn't yet fully been completed.
And that understanding is foundational to a lot of what we do as
Christians.**

— Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs

Now that we've examined Hosea's revelations for the wise concerning judgment and hope from God, we should look at the second division of our book and Hosea's focus on God's unfolding judgment.

UNFOLDING JUDGMENT

In the second division of his book, Hosea collected revelations of God's judgment against Israel and Judah that he had received from God over the decades of his ministry. He drew attention to these revelations to give those who first received his book in Judah another set of insights they needed to be wise in their circumstances. God had already poured out severe judgments on northern Israel time and again, and he was threatening to do the same to Judah. So, what wisdom were the leaders of Judah to gain from these revelations? How were they to lead God's people in the light of what Hosea prophesied? And what wisdom do the revelations of the second division of his book reveal to us today?

As we discussed in our previous lesson, Hosea's chapters on unfolding judgment broadly divide into two sections. First, this division begins with two more of God's lawsuits in 4:1–5:7. Second, Hosea highlighted prophecies that revealed two of God's calls for alarm in 5:8–9:9.

You'll also recall that Hosea received his prophecies about God's unfolding judgment as God poured out his curses through two major Assyrian invasions. Hosea's prophecies focusing on God's lawsuits originated when he received revelations about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. And his prophecies of God's calls for alarm stemmed from revelations he initially received about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C.

As we did earlier, we'll explore Hosea's emphasis on God's unfolding judgment by considering the original meaning of these chapters. Then we'll turn to the modern application of this division. Let's begin with Hosea's original meaning for the second division of his book.

ORIGINAL MEANING

As always, there are many ways to summarize what Hosea hoped his revelations would teach his original audience in these chapters. But for our purposes we'll put it this way:

Israel suffered God's increasing judgments because of their persistent rebellion, and now Judah faces similar judgments because they also have rebelled.

By the time the book of Hosea was composed, the Assyrians had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and threatened the destruction of Judah as well. To explain why this was so, Hosea took his original audience through prophecies from different stages of his ministry to convince them of two perspectives. First, Israel rightly suffered God's increasing judgments because of their persistent rebellion. And second, Judah now faced similar judgments from God because they also had rebelled against him.

To consider this division's original meaning, we'll look first at Israel's rebellion before God. And then we'll touch on Judah's rebellion before God. Let's start with Hosea's revelations regarding Israel's rebellion.

Israel's Rebellion

Throughout these chapters, Hosea's prophecies emphasized Israel's rebellion so much and in so many different ways that it can seem overwhelming. So, it helps if we think in terms of two issues: God's accusations and his judgments.

Accusations. On the one side, Hosea's revelations drew attention to four types of accusations against Israel. First, he pointed out that Israel had violated the fundamental requirements of God's covenant and law. In the section dealing with God's lawsuits, God's earlier lawsuit begins with categorical condemnations. In 4:1, Hosea said that Israel had "no faithfulness or steadfast love" and "no knowledge of God." In verse 2, Hosea alluded to the Ten Commandments when he said that Israel was full of "swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery." And in this same verse, God stressed the particularly heinous sins of violence in Israel, saying, "bloodshed follows bloodshed." Hosea 4:6 sums up widespread conditions in Israel by explaining that the Israelites had "forgotten the law of ... God." In God's later lawsuit, Hosea spoke again of widespread violence. In 5:2, he declared, "the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter."

Then, in Hosea's prophecies highlighting God's calls for alarm, God's first call for alarm repeats this focus on God's covenant and law. In 6:7, God said that "like Adam they transgressed the covenant." Verses 8 and 9 mention violence again, saying that "Gilead is ... tracked with blood... robbers lie in wait ... and even the priests ... murder." Hosea 7:1 raises another accusation of widespread violence when it says, "the thief breaks in and the bandits raid outside." God's second call for alarm records God's accusation in 8:1, saying, "[Israel] transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law." And in verse 12, God sarcastically concluded that Israel would ignore him, even if he wrote "laws by the ten thousands." In fact, 9:7 tells us that Israel viewed God's covenant messengers, the prophets, with contempt, saying, "The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit" — the Holy Spirit — "is mad." Hosea left no room for doubt. Israel had flagrantly violated God's covenant and his law.

A second accusation emphasized in these chapters is against widespread idolatry in Israel. Idolatry was a fundamental violation of the loyalty God required of his people because it represented Israel's treasonous submission to the false gods of other nations. According to 1 Kings 12:28, Jeroboam I established the worship of a golden calf when he founded the kingdom of Israel. And Hosea knew that this rebellion against God had only increased as the Israelites continued to mix their own worship with the idolatry of Canaanite religions. Idolatry also increased every time Israel made an alliance with another nation because international alliances in the ancient world required acknowledging the gods of other nations.

When modern readers notice in the book of Hosea that he condemns the alliances that Israel made with other nations, we sort of scratch our head and wonder what is going on there, because when we think of forming international alliances, we think that's a good thing. I mean, that's what one country does with another in order to establish peace and safety and power and all those kinds of things. So, we think of it as something good. But you have to understand that in the days of the Old Testament that when one nation formed an alliance with another nation, that also involved forming associations of their gods, so that one nation would accept gods from the other and the other nation would accept gods from the one. And so, when Israel — or Judah for that matter — made alliances with foreign kingdoms, then they were *de facto* accepting the gods of those kingdoms. And this was a great rebellion against the God of Israel, because God demanded loyalty only to himself from his people, and he required them to depend on him only. But as soon as they made alliances with other kingdoms, that meant that they had to at least give nominal acknowledgement to the other kingdom's gods. And in addition to that, they actually began to depend on those gods and to pray to those gods.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

We see God's accusations of widespread idolatry in Hosea's prophecies focused on God's lawsuits. In God's earlier lawsuit, in 4:13, God accused the Israelites of practicing idolatry on "mountains, hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth." And in verse 17, it says that "Ephraim" — or northern Israel — "is joined to idols." We also find this accusation in God's later lawsuit, in 5:1, where God accused the "priests" and other leaders in Israel saying, "you have been a snare at Mizpah." A number of interpreters have noted archeological findings from Hosea's day of Canaanite idols in Mizpah.

We find similar accusations of idolatry in God's first call for alarm. In 5:13, we learn that the Israelites "went to Assyria" to make an alliance with the Assyrians and their gods. Hosea 7:11 states that Israel sought foreign gods by "calling to Egypt, [and] going to Assyria." In God's second call for alarm, 8:4 tells us that "with their silver and gold they made idols." In verses 5, 6, God alluded to the golden calf Jeroboam I had erected in Dan, when he spoke of "your calf, O Samaria... the calf of Samaria." In verse 9, God

said again that Israel had “gone up to Assyria.” And verse 11 conveys that Israel had “multiplied [idolatrous] altars for sinning.” Throughout these chapters, Hosea repeatedly pointed to Israel’s fundamental infidelity. They had flagrantly broken the first and second of the Ten Commandments — commandments against following the idolatrous practices of other nations.

A third accusation that appears repeatedly in these chapters is against Israel’s whoredom and adultery. The pain Hosea felt from his own wife’s worship prostitution must have made these accusations especially poignant for him personally. But these chapters focus on *God’s* offense at the Israelites’ involvement in the debauchery of fertility rituals.

God’s earlier lawsuit opens in 4:2 with the accusation that Israel was “committing adultery.” This accusation referred to the physical sexual acts that occurred in fertility religion. According to verses 10, 11, God said that the Israelites “cherish whoredom, wine, and new wine.” They were so deeply involved in these practices that, in verses 12, 13, Hosea said that “a spirit” — or demon — “of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore... daughters play the whore ... brides commit adultery.” In verse 15, God said, “you play the whore, O Israel.” And we read in verse 18 that “they give themselves to whoring.” Then, in God’s later lawsuit, in 5:3, God said again, “you have played the whore.” And in verse 4, we learn that “the spirit of whoredom is within them.”

References to Israel’s debauchery also appear in God’s first call for alarm. Hosea 6:10 speaks of “Ephraim’s whoredom.” Fertility religion was so widespread that God said, in 7:4, “They are all adulterers.” In God’s second call for alarm, Hosea so generalized this accusation that, in 8:9, he described Israel’s foreign mercenaries as “hired lovers.” In 9:1, God said, “you have played the whore, forsaking your God. You have loved a prostitute’s wages on all threshing floors.” God was deeply offended, and even repulsed, by the vile practice of fertility religion in Israel.

Hosea also highlighted a fourth accusation in these chapters: Israel’s hypocritical worship of the Lord. As was common in the ancient world, the leaders of Israel didn’t utterly reject their national religious traditions. They called on the name Yahweh in worship and claimed to humble themselves before him. But they did so only outwardly and not from the heart.

This is why God’s earlier lawsuit directly addressed Israel’s worship leaders in 4:4, saying, “With you is my contention, O priest.” This is also why God insisted in 4:15 that Israel should “Swear not, ‘As the Lord lives.’” Along these lines, God’s later lawsuit expanded his accusations of hypocrisy in 5:1 to include all of Israel’s leaders saying, “O priests ... O house of Israel” — probably a reference to the nobility in general — “and O house of the king” — most likely a reference to the royal family. He admitted in 5:6 that “They shall go to seek the Lord,” with flocks and herds for sacrifice. But he insisted that they will not find God because “He has withdrawn from them.”

In God’s first call for alarm, Hosea urged Israel to repent with sincere worship in 6:1 saying, “Come, let us return to the Lord.” But in verse 4, God revealed that their “love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.” And in verse 6 God insisted, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:9 addresses the hypocrisies of “the priests.” And, according to 7:7, as Israel’s kings fell one after another, God said, “None of them calls upon me.” In verse 14,

God declared, “They do not cry to me from the heart.” According to verse 16, “They return,” — or repent — “but not upward” toward God.

And we find similar accusations in God’s second call for alarm. In 8:2, God said, “To me they cry, ‘My God, we — Israel — know you.’” But in reality, as verse 3 tells us, “Israel has spurned the good.” And according to verse 13, “They sacrifice meat and eat it, but the Lord does not accept them.” Although we may be confident that some in Israel were true believers like Hosea, on the whole, Hosea’s prophecies revealed that the piety of most in Israel, especially their leaders, was nothing more than false piety.

As we can see from this overview of God’s accusations, Hosea stressed that Israel’s sins were far from trivial. Rather, the northern kingdom had fallen into flagrant rebellion against God. They’d rejected God’s covenant and law, engaged in widespread idolatry, given themselves to the whoredom and adultery of fertility religion, and practiced hypocritical worship. Hosea’s prophecies made it clear that Israel’s sins were worthy of God’s severe judgment. So, while these accusations *demonstrated* Israel’s rebellion before God, we must also recognize that judgments were coming from God *in response to* this rebellion.

Judgments. Now, before we look at the judgments associated with Israel’s rebellion, it’s important to keep two things in mind. First, like other Old Testament prophets, Hosea focused on what we may call “temporary judgments.” Judgments such as economic hardship, famine, death, exile, and the like, in association with Assyria’s invasions of the northern kingdom. He did not refer to God’s everlasting judgments — the judgments that will come when history reaches its fulfillment in the latter days.

Second, as both the Old and New Testaments teach, when God pours out his temporary judgments, he has very different purposes in mind for unbelievers and true believers. For unbelievers who never repent and never exercise saving faith, God’s temporary judgments lead to everlasting judgments in the fullness of the latter days. But for true believers, God’s temporary judgments are his loving discipline, designed to ensure everlasting blessings in the fullness of the latter days.

Consider the kinds of judgments related to the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. that appear in God’s lawsuits. Because this was early in Hosea’s ministry, these prophecies threatened relatively limited judgments. For instance, in God’s earlier lawsuit, 4:3 predicts trouble in Israel’s economy and food supply with these words: “The land mourns ... [the people] languish ... beasts ... birds ... and even the fish ... are taken away.” In verses 4, 5, God focused primarily on Israel’s leadership, rather than on the whole nation, addressing, “priest ... prophet ... your mother” — this last term referring to the nobility in Samaria. God addressed priests again in verse 6 saying, “I reject you from being a priest to me.” In verse 7, he declared, “I will change their glory” — meaning Israel’s prosperity — “into shame.” And he threatened to punish the priests once more in verse 10 when he said, “They shall eat, but not be satisfied.” Also at this early stage, in verse 14, God limited his judgment in a remarkable way. He said, “I will not punish your daughters ... nor your brides” for their involvement in worship prostitution, because the fathers and husbands bore the primary responsibility for their misconduct. In verse 16, Hosea remarked that God would no longer feed Israel “like a lamb in a broad pasture.” Instead, according to verse 19, “They shall be ashamed.”

In much the same way, God’s later lawsuit addressed the leadership of Israel in 5:2 saying, “I will discipline all of them.” And verse 5 indicates that more difficulties were coming to the northern kingdom. Here we read that, “Israel ... shall stumble in his guilt.”

Now, as we’ve seen, God’s calls for alarm were revealed to Hosea later on as he predicted the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C. — the invasion that led to the fall of Samaria. So, as we should expect, God’s judgments against Israel’s sins were much more severe in these prophecies. In the first call for alarm, 5:9 declares that Israel “shall become a desolation.” In verse 11, Israel will be “oppressed, crushed in judgment.” According to verse 13, Israel’s alliance with Assyria “is not able to cure” their problems. And in verse 14, God warned of exile from the Promised Land, saying, “I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.” Now, even as God increased his threats of judgment against Israel, in 7:1 God admitted that, even now, he would heal Israel. But Israel continued to rebel against him. As verse 10 puts it, “They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him, for all this.” So, in verse 13, God declared, “Woe to them ... Destruction to them.” In this same verse, God reaffirmed, “I would redeem them,” but they continued in their sinful ways. And as a result, verse 16 tells us that “Their princes shall fall by the sword.”

God’s second call for alarm — originally received even closer to the invasion of 722 B.C. — announces in 8:3 that “the enemy shall pursue” Israel. Verses 6 and 7 declare that “The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces... and [Israel] shall reap the whirlwind.” Then verse 8 says that “Israel is swallowed up” by Assyria. And verse 10 reveals that the leaders of Israel “shall soon writhe because of the tribute” owed to Assyria. And beyond this, Hosea referred to an upcoming Assyrian exile in verse 13 by saying that Israel “shall return to Egypt.” As God put it in 9:3, “They shall not remain in the land ... Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and ... eat unclean food in Assyria.” Israel’s defeat would be so severe that in verse 6 God said, “Egypt shall gather them ... [and] bury them.” And as Hosea prophesied in verse 7, very near the fall of Samaria, “The days of punishment ... and recompense have come.”

The Assyrian exile was a punishment from the Lord because of the sins of the people and because they had forsaken the Lord and the Lord’s laws. In the book of Hosea, we ... see the prophet giving more explanation concerning the Assyrian exile. In 9:7 the prophet says: “The days of punishment have come; the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred.” He asserts here that “the days of punishment” and “the days of recompense” had come, which refers to the Assyrian exile.

In the same chapter — 9:15 — we read these words: “Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels.” Because of rebellion, disobedience, and evil, the exile came, or would come, to the people of Israel.

Finally, in the same chapter — 9:17 — it says: “My God will reject them because they have not listened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.” The exile was preceded by several invitations from prophets — Hosea being one of them — who were sent by the Lord to the people to call them to return and repent. But the people did not obey, and as a result, the exile was a punishment from the Lord to the people, because they insisted on their willful rebellion against the Lord.

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

As we’ve seen so far, the original meaning of this division focused heavily on Israel’s rebellion before God. But in his second division, Hosea also revealed Judah’s rebellion.

Judah’s Rebellion

Listen again to the end of our summary of Hosea’s second-division revelations about God’s unfolding judgment:

... Judah faces similar judgments [to Israel] because they also have rebelled.

You’ll recall that in the first division, Hosea only said positive things about Judah. But in this division, Hosea indicated that, over the years, Judah had become like Israel. We know from what other prophets said, and from what Hosea himself said, that Judah, like Israel, had abandoned God’s covenant and law. Like Israel before them, they were practicing widespread idolatry, engaging in the whoredom and adultery of fertility religion, and performing hypocritical worship. And for these reasons, Judah was now facing divine judgment as well.

As we know, Hosea’s focus on God’s unfolding judgment, began with two of God’s lawsuits. God’s earlier lawsuit, concerning Assyria’s invasion in 732 B.C., took place when either Uzziah or Jotham ruled as righteous kings in Judah. So, in this opening section of the second division, we still find positive words about Judah. In fact, God revealed a striking contrast between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In 4:15, God said, “Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty.” In this earlier lawsuit, God simply warned Judah not to become like the northern kingdom.

But the same cannot be said of God’s later lawsuit that was revealed to Hosea as the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. drew near. At this stage in Hosea’s ministry, Ahaz had begun to rule in Judah. Ahaz promoted idolatry and injustice and trusted in an alliance with Assyria and Assyria’s gods to gain protection from his enemies. So, in 5:5, God announced his judgment that “Israel ... shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.” And indeed, Judah suffered in many ways as the Syrian-Israelite coalition took place at this time.

Hosea's revelations concerning God's calls for alarm also addressed conditions in Judah. You'll recall that, in the first call for alarm, Hosea prophesied about Assyria's invasion of Israel in 722 B.C. In all likelihood, Ahaz was still king in Judah at this time. And in 5:10, we read, "The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark." Many interpreters believe this passage refers to Ahaz' attempt to annex territories in Benjamin in retaliation for Israel's attacks during the Syrian-Israelite coalition. If this interpretation is correct, rather than seeking the healing of God's people, Judah violated Israel's land-inheritance rights. And in response, in verses 10-14, God threatened Judah saying, "I will pour out my wrath like [flood]water... I am ... like dry rot to the house of Judah... like a young lion to the house of Judah. I ... will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue." With these words, Hosea predicted the horrors of Sennacherib's invasion that would come to Judah in 701 B.C. God also accused Judah of testing his patience at this stage by their hypocrisy when he asked Judah in 6:4, "What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." And God threatened judgment against Judah in verse 11 when he said, "For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed." The "harvest" appointed for Judah was most likely Judah's upcoming troubles at the hands of the Assyrians.

Now, consider what God said about Judah in his second call for alarm as the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. came even closer. This was probably while Ahaz and Hezekiah were co-regents in Judah. In 8:14, God noted that "Judah has multiplied fortified cities," a reference to Hezekiah's efforts to fortify Judah against Assyria. Of course, building fortifications was not sinful in itself. But Hezekiah's fortifications were a symbol of his rebellion against God because, in addition to his fortifications, he also sought protection from Assyria through an alliance with Egypt and Egypt's gods. As a result, God threatened judgment in verse 14 saying, "I will send a fire upon his cities." This threat was fulfilled when Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 B.C.

When Hosea first received his prophecies of unfolding judgment, he directly, and repeatedly, addressed the need for repentance, first in Israel and then later in Judah as well. His ministry extended for decades because God continued to show patience toward his people. But sadly, Israel's rebellion only grew. And, in 722 B.C., God finally executed the judgment he had threatened against them. The northern kingdom was destroyed by Assyria, and its people were sent into exile.

Later on, when Hosea composed his book in the days of Hezekiah, Judah was facing a similar threat of destruction and exile. In light of this reality, Hosea's prophecies of unfolding judgment offered Judah's leaders two crucial insights. On the one side, his prophecies demonstrated, beyond doubt, that God had been more than patient and just in his severe discipline of the northern kingdom. No one could rightly question God's final destruction of Samaria and the exile of the northern tribes. And on the other side, Hosea's prophecies also gave Judah's leaders a view into the condition of their own kingdom. God had protected Judah, as they remained faithful to him during the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham. But Ahaz and Hezekiah had departed from the path of righteousness, leaving the leaders of Judah in Hezekiah's day in great need of wisdom — difficult, sobering wisdom. Judah had become like Israel, and they were no longer safe from God's judgment.

Having looked at the original meaning of these chapters on God's unfolding judgment, let's consider the modern application of this division. How should these revelations impact our lives today?

MODERN APPLICATION

Unfortunately, many evangelicals have difficulty gaining any wisdom from the second division of Hosea because it focuses so much on God's accusations and judgments against his people. All too often we assume that these themes have nothing to do with us because Christ has delivered us from God's judgment through his death and resurrection. Now, we know that Christ's righteousness has been imputed to true believers in the court of heaven through faith alone. And this imputation has secured the deliverance of every true believer from God's everlasting judgment. These are essential facets of the Christian gospel. But to apply the wisdom revealed in the second division of Hosea to our lives today, we also have to keep in mind several other important facets of what the New Testament teaches.

It will help to approach the modern application of Hosea's second division as we approached his first division. We'll consider what the New Testament teaches about the bride of Christ. Then we'll look at the fulfillment of the latter days in Christ. Let's think first about the church as the bride of Christ.

Bride of Christ

As we saw earlier in this lesson, there's always been just one bride or people of God because the New Testament church grew out of God's people in the Old Testament. But to understand how Hosea's revelations of God's unfolding judgment apply to us today, we need to point out another connection. In both the Christian church, and in Israel and Judah, a distinction is often made between the visible people of God and the invisible people of God.

In Romans 2:28, 29, the apostle Paul made this distinction in reference to Old Testament Israel. He said, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly..." — or "visibly," as it may be translated — "But a Jew is one inwardly" — or "invisibly." And for this reason, Hosea's focus on unfolding judgment addressed both unbelievers and true believers in God's Old Testament bride, Israel and Judah.

In much the same way, Christian theologians have often made a distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. In the New Testament age, the visible church consists of everyone who professes faith in Christ, their children, and those who are otherwise closely associated with the Christian faith. The invisible church, however, is a special group of people within the visible church that consists of those who have come, or will come, to saving faith in Christ. So, much like Hosea addressed both unbelievers and true believers in ancient Israel and Judah, we must be ready to apply Hosea's revelations of God's unfolding judgment to the entire visible bride of Christ in our day as well.

We talk in both theology and in history about the visible church and about the invisible church. The visible church is generally referred to as the local expression of the body of Christ. That can be made up of real Christians and people who think they are Christians. The invisible church would be the people of God of all times, and all places, heaven and earth — so, all that have been the people of God forever — that’s the invisible church because there are many of those members, a great majority of them, we cannot see at the present time. They are in heaven with the Lord, or they are in other places of the world. The visible church is that which we typically think of as the local church, when Christians gather together, maybe many churches come together. But it’s important to remember that in the visible church there will always be “wheat and tares,” as Jesus said. You’ll have the true people of God; you’ll have those that appear to be, just like you had the disciples who were those faithful to Jesus, but you had Judas in there. Paul had his Demas among those that were his disciples, if you will.

— Dr. Donald S. Whitney

With the current imperfection of the bride of Christ in mind, let’s consider the modern application of Hosea’s prophecies of unfolding judgment to the church during the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

As we’ve already mentioned, Christ brings the blessings of the latter days in three stages: the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom. The New Testament clearly teaches that at the *consummation* of the kingdom, the bride of Christ will be purified when Christ returns in glory. Christ will pour out everlasting judgments on unbelievers in the church who’ve never repented and have never exercised saving faith. And he’ll graciously pour out everlasting blessings on true believers in the church. At that time, the bride of Christ will no longer need to hear God’s accusations and judgments.

But during the inauguration and continuation of Christ’s kingdom, the situation is very different. Jesus didn’t perfect his bride in his first advent. And his bride will remain imperfect as his kingdom continues throughout church history. So, until Christ’s bride is perfected at his glorious return, God’s accusations and judgments continue to apply to the entire visible church.

Of course, we always have to remember that God has revealed more of himself in Christ. So, the wisdom of Hosea’s prophecies must always be applied in the light of New Testament revelation. Listen to the way Jesus himself did this in Luke 24:46-47 when he connected his resurrection with repentance. Jesus told his disciples:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name (Luke 24:46-47).

Here, Jesus applied Hosea 6:1, 2 to himself in the light of God's New Testament revelation. Hosea had announced that blessings for Israel would come quickly, or "on the third day," if Israel would sincerely repent and return to the Lord. And Jesus applied this to his own resurrection on the third day and to his call for repentance. As just one other example, listen to Matthew 9:13, and the way Jesus applied Hosea's prophetic wisdom to his first-century audience. Jesus said:

**Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."
For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matthew 9:13).**

The expression "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" derives from Hosea 6:6, where Hosea accused Israel of hypocritical worship. And Jesus used Hosea's words to confront the hypocrisy of the Jews in his own day.

Given Jesus' example, it's clear that the second division of Hosea applies to everyone in the visible bride of Christ during the continuation of Christ's kingdom. And, as it was in Hosea's day, God continues to pour out both temporary blessings and temporary judgments on his bride. Both unbelievers and true believers in the visible church suffer temporary judgments in the form of hardships, natural disasters, sickness, war, oppression, physical death, and the like. And, as both the Old and New Testaments indicate, God sends these judgments for a variety of reasons. At times, he sends them in response to our own actions. At other times, they are God's response to the actions of others associated with us. And of course, until Christ returns in glory, the visible church experiences God's temporary judgments simply because creation still reels from the curse of Adam's sin.

For this reason, Hosea's accusations and warnings of judgment against Israel and Judah still offer us great wisdom. We may not be tempted to violate God's covenant and law precisely as God's people did in the days of Hosea. But we must be faithful to God's covenant and law as people living in the new covenant in Christ. We may not practice widespread idolatry as they did in Hosea's time, but we are to avoid idolatry in whatever forms it takes in our day. We may not involve ourselves in the whoredom and adultery of ancient Canaanite fertility worship, but we are to turn from every form of sexual immorality. And even though we don't fall into hypocritical worship exactly as Israel and Judah did, God still calls on us to approach him in sincere repentance and devotion.

When viewed in the light of New Testament revelation, every accusation and judgment that God brought against Israel and Judah gives us wisdom for how we should live today. So, even as we endure God's temporary judgments, we must humble ourselves, repent of our sins and renew our faith in Christ.

Now that we've looked at Hosea's revelations for the wise dealing with judgment and hope and unfolding judgment, we're ready to turn to the wisdom Hosea conveyed through prophecies about God's unfolding hope in the third division of our book.

UNFOLDING HOPE

In the first division of his book, Hosea explained that, after a period of judgment, Israel and Judah would be reunited under the rule of David's house in the latter days. But in the second division, Hosea presented prophecies from several decades of his ministry that explained why God had rightly devastated Israel, and was also bringing judgment against Judah. These harsh realities must have torn at the hearts of Judah's leaders who first received the book of Hosea. Was everything lost? Was there anything Israel and Judah could do to turn things around? The third division of our book answered these questions. Hosea presented yet another set of revelations he received throughout his ministry. And he did this for those who desired a path of wisdom towards God's blessings.

We'll explore Hosea's presentation of unfolding hope from God in the same way we've looked at the other divisions of his book. We'll consider its original meaning. And then, we'll turn to its modern application. So, what was the original meaning Hosea hoped to impart to the leaders of Judah who first received his book?

ORIGINAL MEANING

Hosea could have summarized the revelations in the last division of his book in this way:

Hope for God's blessings of the latter days is found in God's gracious responses to his people, but these blessings will come only as God's people respond properly to his judgments.

In these chapters, Hosea gathered prophecies from throughout his ministry to establish two perspectives. First, there was still hope for God's blessings of the latter days because of God's gracious responses to the sins of his people. But second, Hosea's prophecies also made it clear that the blessings of the latter days would come only as God's people responded properly to his judgments.

Let's look at both sides of Hosea's original meaning in his third division — first at God's responses to the sins of his people, and then at the people's responses to God. To begin with, what did Hosea want Judah's leaders to learn from God's responses to the sins of his people?

God's Responses

You'll recall that Hosea's chapters on unfolding hope divide into five main sections. The comparison of Israel with fruit, in 9:10-12, came to Hosea when he

received his initial prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. His comparison with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, and with a luxuriant vine, in 10:1-10, also derived from prophecies concerning Assyria's invasion in 732 B.C. The comparison with a trained calf, in 10:11-15, and the final comparison with a beloved child or son, in 11:1-14:8, originated when Hosea received prophecies about Assyria's invasion in 722 B.C.

We're about to see something quite remarkable in this division of our book. Hosea introduced each of these sections with God's reflections on his relationship with Israel in the past. And these reflections revealed how God had responded graciously toward Israel, even as he was threatening judgment against them. All too often, we may think that it's impossible for God to be both wrathful and merciful at the same time. But Hosea shaped this portion of his book to reveal that this wasn't true at all. As God revealed his judgments, he also revealed his favor toward Israel. And this fact offered those who first received Hosea's book irreplaceable wisdom for the challenges they faced in their day.

Fruit. Hosea introduced these perspectives using God's comparison of northern Israel with fruit in 9:10-12. These verses disclose how God's reflections on the past demonstrated his gracious response to Israel's sins. We see God's favor toward Israel in verse 10 where God recalled that Israel had been "like grapes in the wilderness" and "like the first fruit on the fig tree." Here, God reflected on how he cherished Israel in the days when Moses led them through the wilderness. And he indicated that this favorable disposition had not ended, even as he announced the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C.

These verses also reveal God's patience with Israel. In verse 10, God mentioned that Israel's idolatry and whoredom began long ago. As he put it, "Your fathers ... came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame." As we read in Numbers 25, in the days of Moses, Israelite men worshiped the idols of Moab and engaged in fertility rituals with Moabite women as they travelled toward the Promised Land. So, Israel's idolatry and whoredom were nothing new. And by recalling this event, God demonstrated that he had shown great patience toward the tribes of Israel for generations.

Planted Palm. The second comparison of northern Israel with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, also touches on God's gracious responses to Israel's sins. First, we see God's ongoing favor toward Israel in verse 13 where God declared that Israel "was like a young palm planted in a meadow." This comparison represents God's reflections on the past when he had "planted" the tribes of Israel in the Promised Land. Once again, even as God threatened severe judgments in the Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C., he remembered how he felt toward Israel.

And more than this, God spoke of his patience toward Israel. In verse 15, we read, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them." This verse refers to 1 Samuel 13:8-14, where King Saul offered sacrifices contrary to the Lord's command. Once again, it was only after God had graciously tolerated violations of worship for generations that he determined to bring Assyria against Israel.

Luxuriant Vine. God's gracious responses to Israel during Hosea's ministry appear in similar ways in his comparison of Israel with a luxuriant vine in 10:1-10. God showed his ongoing favor toward Israel in verse 1 when he said, "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields

its fruit ... his fruit increased ... his country improved.” God reflected on how much he admired Israel’s growth and expansion, even as he determined that he would bring judgment through Assyria’s invasion of 722 B.C.

And once again, God’s reflections on the past revealed his patience toward Israel. In verse 9, God again referred to the days of Saul. He said, “From the days of Gibeah” — the capital of Saul’s kingdom — “you have sinned, O Israel.” God was about to judge Israel, but only after he had extended kindness to many generations of Israelites.

Trained Calf. After this, Hosea turned to God’s comparison of Israel with a trained calf in 10:11-15. God’s responses to Israel in these verses disclosed his continuing favor toward them. In the first half of verse 11, he said, “Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck.” God reflected favorably on how Israel had been like a lively, industrious calf, even as he condemned them to the trials of Assyrian aggression in 722 B.C.

God also revealed his patience toward Israel in verse 13 when he said that Israel had “plowed iniquity ... reaped injustice ... [and] eaten the fruit of lies” for generations. It was only after God had tolerated these sins for many years that he brought his judgment.

Beloved Child. Finally, Hosea highlighted God’s gracious responses to Israel’s sins as he reported God’s comparison of Israel with a beloved child or son in 11:1–14:8. Again, we see God’s favor toward Israel in his reflections on the past.

In 11:1, God recalled that, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Although God was about to destroy the northern kingdom through the Assyrians in 722 B.C., he still remembered his fatherly love for Israel. As he put it so tenderly in 11:8: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.”

We also find that God disclosed his patience toward Israel in this section. In 11:2, God complained that through the centuries “The more [the Israelites] were called, the more they went away.” And he reflected on how long he had shown forbearance toward the northern kingdom.

The last division of the book of Hosea is arranged in a way that you can’t spot right at first unless you’re looking very carefully, but a number of interpreters have said that this is the best way to understand the arrangement; that they’re various snippets of prophecies that Hosea gave at different times in his ministry, but that they are arranged around these sort of controlling metaphors. And there are a number of those metaphors, but each one of them has this in common: they were things that were highly prized in the ancient world — finding figs out in the wilderness or finding a planted palm, or finding a vineyard that was spreading, those kinds of things, a trained heifer that could plow the fields, a son of a home. Those were highly prized items, and God compares the northern kingdom of Israel to those things... Especially that last one, the son, where he says, “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I lifted him up.” And as a

loving Father, God had endeared himself to Israel, and they were dear to him, yet they kept rebelling. The more he gave them, the more he did for them, the more they rebelled against him. But then he says, “But then, how can I give you up, O Israel? How can I give you up, Ephraim? I can’t do it because you’re that precious to me.” So we miss the point of those metaphors unless we understand that, in his wisdom, yes, God disciplines his people, his covenant people, as a matter of fact, his *precious* covenant people, but he never gives up on his covenant people; that one day, somehow they will come to repentance and they will receive his blessings.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

It isn’t difficult to understand the purpose of these prophecies about God’s gracious responses to Israel when Hosea first received them. During the different stages of his ministry, Hosea had watched how God displayed his favor and patience toward Israel to call them to repentance. But for the most part, they didn’t listen and continued to rebel against him. So, the northern kingdom fell further and further under God’s curses. But God still offered his grace to them every step along the way.

So, when Hosea wrote his book to give Judah’s leaders wisdom in Hezekiah’s day, he concentrated the third division on God’s gracious responses to Israel. He wanted to inspire Judah’s leaders to hope for the blessings of the latter days, even though God had sent the northern kingdom into exile. Despite Israel’s rebellion, God’s reflections on the past revealed his favor and patience toward them. And this offered Judah hope that one day the two kingdoms would be reunited under the rule of David’s house, and God would still pour out his latter day blessings on his people.

We’ve seen how Hosea’s original meaning in the third division of his book taught Judah’s leaders to have hope because of God’s gracious responses to his people. Now let’s consider how the hope of future blessings also lay in the people’s responses to God.

People’s Responses

As our summary of the third division’s revelations tells us:

Hope for God’s blessings of the latter days ... will come only as God’s people respond properly to his judgments.

God’s gracious attitude toward his people throughout Hosea’s ministry offered hope for God’s blessings in the future. But at the same time, Hosea didn’t diminish the significance of human responsibility. If Judah’s leaders wanted to see God withdraw his curses and begin to lead his people toward the blessings of the latter days, then the people of Israel and Judah needed to do something. They had to repent and live in service to God.

As we know, the five sections of this division of Hosea were first revealed to Hosea at different stages of his ministry. But because the northern kingdom turned away from God much earlier than the southern kingdom, the beginning of this division concentrates primarily on *Israel's* response to God. Of course, during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Judah fell into rebellion against God as well. So later, Hosea also added calls for Judah to respond to God with humility and repentance.

In God's comparison of Israel with fruit in 9:10-12, Hosea called Israel to reckon with their long history of rebellion against God. As we saw earlier, verse 10 focuses on the fact that Israel's "fathers . . . came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame." God's reflections on the past disclosed his patience, but Hosea also emphasized something that Israel needed to learn about themselves. Their current rebellion against God was not an isolated event. On the contrary, Israel had to acknowledge that their ancestors had stored up the wrath of God against them by practicing idolatry and fertility worship for generations.

God's comparison of Israel with a planted palm, in 9:13-17, challenged Israel even further about acknowledging their past. In 9:15, God pointed out that he "began to hate them" in Gilgal during the reign of Saul. Clearly, the northern tribes had never sincerely turned from the sins of their ancestors. As Hosea said in 9:17, "They have not listened to him." Israel's repeated refusal to heed warnings from God made their sins great in his eyes.

In God's comparison of Israel with a luxuriant vine, in 10:1-10, we find a similar focus on repentance over the past. In 10:9, God declared that Israel's sins extended as far back as King Saul. As we read earlier, God told them, "From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel." But Hosea also pointed out, in verse 2, that despite their claims that they had humbled themselves before God, "their heart [was] false." And again in verse 4, God said that "They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants."

In his comparison of the northern kingdom with a trained calf in 10:11-15, God again confirmed Israel's need to acknowledge their sin. In verse 13, God accused Israel of a long history of rebellion and failure to repent by saying, "You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies. . . you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors."

Now, as we've seen, this section most likely originated when Hosea prophesied about the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C. — after Ahaz had begun to reign in Judah. Unlike the kings before him, Ahaz led Judah in rebellion against God. So here, in addition to addressing *Israel's* response to God, Hosea also addressed *Judah's*. But unlike Israel, Judah didn't have a long history of rebellion in the past. So, Hosea focused on Judah's response in their current circumstances. In 10:11-12, we read these words:

Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself. Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you (Hosea 10:11-12).

Rather than calling on Judah to repent of a long history of failure, Hosea urged Judah to pay attention to what was happening *right then*. They must turn from Ahaz'

sinful ways. They must sow righteousness and reap steadfast love. They must “break up [their] fallow” — or unused — “ground.” And why? As the threat of Assyria came against them too, it was the time for the people of Judah to seek the Lord. If they turned from their evil ways, then a new day would come to Judah. God would “come and rain righteousness upon [them].” With these words, Hosea alluded to the blessings of the latter days when Israel and Judah would reunite under the rule of David’s house. But the kingdom of Judah couldn’t begin to fulfill their role until they repented, and God’s righteousness was poured out on them.

Finally, God’s comparison of Israel with a beloved child or son in 11:1–14:8 offers the most extensive treatment of Israel’s need to acknowledge failures in the past. Once again, God confronted them with their long history of rebellion. He had treated them as his son from the time of Moses. But in 11:2, God reflected on the fact that, “The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.” Israel’s stubbornness through the centuries led God to conclude, in verse 7, “My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.” Israel had become so corrupt that God would not accept their hypocritical calls for mercy. As the exile of Israel continued, the northern tribes had to forsake the insincere, hypocritical piety of their ancestors. God called on them to offer earnest repentance over their sins. But God also reassured Israel that the blessings of the latter days would still come to them. As we read in verse 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, declares the Lord.”

Judah’s response to God in their current circumstances is also mentioned in this last section. In 11:12, God announced that “Judah is unruly against God” (NIV). Unfortunately, the Hebrew of this passage is difficult to interpret. It’s been translated both as a word of God’s approval of Judah, in contrast with Israel, and as a word of judgment against Judah. But given the placement of this passage near the end of Hosea’s ministry, it’s most likely a word of judgment. As the destruction of Samaria grew near, Judah became increasingly more rebellious, just like Israel. Listen to 12:2-6, the last and longest prophecy about Judah in the third division of Hosea:

The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways; he will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us — the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial name: “So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God” (Hosea 12:2-6).

In this passage, God called Judah to reflect on the story of Jacob’s life in Genesis 25–36. His prophecy noted how Jacob had sinned when he took his brother by the heel. But Jacob also strove with God and with the angel at Peniel. There Jacob wept and sought God’s favor, and he prevailed. By implication, Hosea called on Judah to weep over sin and seek God’s favor. And what was the result for Jacob? He met God at Bethel and learned anew that God is “the Lord, the God of hosts,” a divine title that referred to

God as the head of angelic armies. Hosea applied the story of Jacob to Judah. Judah also could have the favor of the Lord, the God of the heavenly armies, as they faced their enemies, whether Assyria or Babylon. If “by the help of ... God,” they would “return” — or repent — “hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for ... God,” then they would see the Lord intervene on their behalf with his angelic army.

It’s not difficult to see why Hosea included these words about Judah toward the end of his book. As you’ll recall, he either composed his book as Judah faced the threat of Assyria, just before Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C. Or, he wrote it as Judah faced the threat of Babylon, just *after* Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 B.C. — as we know from Isaiah 39:6. In either case, Judah desperately needed God’s help. If they wanted to see God lead his angelic army against their enemies, they needed to respond with humility and repentance. They needed to acknowledge that they had been like Jacob in his early years, and that they must become like Jacob in his later years. Then, and only then, could Judah be the channel of God’s latter day blessings to the northern kingdom of Israel.

But, as much as Hosea pleaded for Judah’s repentance, he still knew that Judah’s leaders needed hope for the northern tribes in exile as well. Hosea had made it clear in the first division of his book that God’s blessings would come after Israel and Judah were reunited in submission to David’s house. So, Judah’s hope for latter day blessings could only come if Israel returned to the Lord. Because of this, Hosea closed this last section of his book with a lengthy call for Israel to repent in 14:1-8. Listen to 14:1-3:

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy” (Hosea 14:1-3).

In effect, Hosea called for northern Israelites, whether living with him in Judah or scattered in other regions, to “Return ... to the Lord your God.” And to insure that they knew how to do this, he provided them with a liturgy of repentance. They were to say to the Lord, “Take away all iniquity.” They were to ask God to “accept what is good ... the vows of our lips.” They were to reject any hope in Assyria and horses, or human military strength. They were to reject all idolatry, never saying, “Our God” to an idol. And what would be God’s response to their sincere repentance? In 14:7, God said:

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon (Hosea 14:7).

When northern Israelites humbled themselves in this way, God promised to pour out blessings.

The original meaning associated with Hosea’s prophecies of unfolding hope revealed many insights into God’s gracious responses and the responses required of Israel and Judah. Now, let’s consider the modern application of this division. How should Hosea’s revelations in this division impact us today?

MODERN APPLICATION

In the third division of his book, Hosea reassured Judah's leaders that God still loved his bride and would one day restore his beloved people. And in much the same way, as followers of Christ today, we can be assured that God continues to love the bride of Christ. But much like Hosea pointed toward the need for Israel and Judah to respond properly to God, if we hope to participate in the blessings of the latter days when Christ returns, we too must pay attention to how we respond to God's love.

To explore the modern application of this third division, we'll look once again at the New Testament themes of the bride of Christ and the latter days in Christ. Consider first how Hosea's final revelations apply to us as the bride of Christ.

Bride of Christ

In Hosea's day, the sins of God's Old Testament bride led to severe suffering under God's judgments. Northern Israel had been sent into exile through Assyrian aggression. And, as Judah began to rebel, they were threatened with destruction and exile as well. Yet, despite these disappointing, and even horrifying circumstances, Hosea called on every person in the visible and invisible church to seek forgiveness through repentance and faith. He looked forward to what other prophets called "a remnant," a faithful people who would turn to God for salvation and would receive his everlasting blessings.

In much the same way, until Christ returns in glory, the bride of Christ will remain far from perfect. And at different times and in different ways, God has brought judgment against his New Testament people. While the church is strong in some parts of the world, in other places, where the church was once strong, it barely exists because God has brought his judgment. But much like Hosea, we can be confident that no matter how hopeless the condition of the church may seem, God will not set his bride aside and find another people. God calls every man, woman and child in the visible and invisible church to seek forgiveness through repentance and faith. He calls *us* to be the "remnant" of faithful people who will receive full redemption and everlasting blessings when Christ returns.

With this basic orientation toward the condition of the bride of Christ, let's consider the modern application of Hosea's last division in terms of the latter days in Christ.

Latter Days in Christ

As we learned earlier, Christ's fulfillment of the latter days takes place throughout the New Testament age. It began in the inauguration of his kingdom. It reaches greater heights during the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history. And it will be

completed when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom. So, as we've done with Hosea's other divisions, we'll approach his prophecies about God's unfolding hope with all three of these stages in mind.

In the first place, the New Testament makes it clear that the hope Hosea offered to Israel and Judah began to be fulfilled during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. Jesus' first advent demonstrated that God hadn't utterly abandoned his bride. Rather, in Christ, he showed favor and patience toward his people by beginning to fulfill Hosea's hopeful prophecies concerning the latter days. But during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, God still required the human response of repentance and faith. So, just as in Hosea's book, Jesus' gospel combines God's mercy with human response. In Matthew 2:15, we can see this coupling of grace and repentance. Matthew wrote:

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Matthew 2:15).

"This" refers to Joseph, Mary and Jesus' flight to Egypt and their safe return. Matthew quoted from Hosea 11:1 where God showed great mercy when he called the nation of Israel out of Egypt. And Matthew stated that this prophecy was fulfilled during the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, when Christ returned from Egypt after the death of Herod.

Now, we have to be careful here. Matthew knew that Hosea didn't refer directly to Jesus. Instead, Hosea referred to Israel's exodus from Egypt and how Israel rebelled against God, despite his great mercy toward them. Matthew pointed to the fact that God had shown great mercy to his bride by calling Jesus — his royal Son — out of Egypt. But many in Israel still rebelled against God. As Matthew demonstrated a number of times in his gospel, even in his mercy, God still requires the human response of repentance and faith. And in Jesus' day, many, like Herod, fell under God's everlasting judgment because they didn't respond appropriately to God's mercy in Christ.

In Hosea 11:1, God said, "Out of Egypt I have called my son," and that harkens back to God's call to Moses, because when God called Moses to liberate his people, he said to Moses, "Israel is my firstborn son." And then the instruction that he gave to Moses was to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son. Let my son go. Let my people go that they may worship me in the desert." So, that language goes back to the call of Moses and the exodus... But it also, in reminding us of the exodus and the Mosaic period, it reminds us of what God gave to Israel back in the desert. He gave to Israel his law, and in his law he promised blessings on obedience and cursings on disobedience. And so, in reminding Israel of from where Israel came, he was reminding Israel also of Israel's responsibilities to the law. And that was the call in Hosea. The people had been unfaithful. They had chosen disobedience and chosen cursing instead of obedience and blessing. If we take that up into the New Testament, it's fascinating that in the New Testament Matthew quotes that from Hosea, referring it to Jesus Christ because Joseph and Mary and Jesus had to flee into Egypt and then came up

out of Egypt. And Matthew, interestingly and surprisingly quotes this and said, “Out of Egypt I have called my son,” recognizing that Jesus is the new Israel, Jesus is the true Israel, Jesus is the obedient Israel, and Jesus is repeating the exodus and the coming up out of Egypt, but he’s doing it right. He’s doing it obediently this time. So Israel, the real Israel, has finally obeyed.

— Dr. Larry Trotter

In the second place, throughout the continuation of Christ’s kingdom, the church must apply Hosea’s third-division revelations to our present circumstances. As the church has spread further and further throughout the world, God’s grace in Christ has reached more and more people — both Jews and Gentiles. And despite our imperfections, God still mercifully cherishes his bride, the church. So, our hope for blessings must always be rooted in God’s gracious responses to our failures. Even so, Hosea insisted that the hope of latter day blessings also rested in proper human responses to God’s grace. And in the same way, God’s blessings in Christ come to those who turn from their sin and call out to God for salvation. This is why repentance is such a vital dimension of the daily lives of all who claim to follow Christ today.

In the third place, Hosea’s prophecies of God’s unfolding hope are ultimately fulfilled in the consummation of Christ’s kingdom. Hosea offered Israel and Judah the hope of blessings in the latter days to those who would repent. And the New Testament offers the bride of Christ today hope for the glories of the latter days. Because of God’s love for us, he will one day completely cleanse from sin all those who have saving faith. And he’ll deliver them from all judgment as he brings them into the blessings of the new creation. In 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, the apostle Paul referred to the consummation of the latter days in this way:

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written ... “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Here the apostle extolled the wonder of Christ’s return by referring to Hosea 13:14. There, God mocked the power of death despite the judgment of destruction and exile that had come upon Israel. Hope was not gone. The curse of death would cease to have any effect on Israel because, in the latter days, God would redeem them and reunify them with Judah in submission to the house of David.

As Christians, we know that this hope will one day be fulfilled in Christ, the great son of David. Despite the failures and hardships we still face in our day, we look forward with great expectation to the return of Christ. On that day, all who have put their hopes in the grace of God in Christ, and all who have repented of their sins, will receive the full blessings of the latter days. We will join Hosea in mocking the power of death and the grave, as the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead raises us up into everlasting life.

The apostle John expressed this same hope in his vision of the consummation of Christ’s kingdom in the book of Revelation. Drawing from a number of themes in the

book of Hosea, he described the new Jerusalem, the glorious city of David's son and the dwelling place of God's bride. As we read in Revelation 21:2-3:

I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21:2-3).

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Hosea's revelations for the wise, we've considered how Hosea revealed God's judgment and hope for the people of God and the blessings that will come in the latter days through Judah. We've examined how Hosea taught Judah's leaders in Hezekiah's day why God's unfolding judgment had come upon both Israel and Judah. And we've explored the unfolding hope of blessings that will come to God's people in the latter days by God's grace and by his people's response to that grace.

God's revelations to Hosea provided wisdom to the people of God hundreds of years before Christ. And they still offer wisdom to us today. As the bride of Christ, we face the challenges of living in a world that still suffers under God's judgments. But God has never given up on his church. He sent Christ to secure our salvation and begin the latter days. And Christ lives in us now through the Holy Spirit, to lead us into the blessings of the world to come. When we take to heart the wisdom that the book of Hosea offers, we will overcome this world and join with countless others in the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb. As Christ's beloved bride, we will receive the blessing of sharing with Christ in the immeasurable joys of everlasting glory.

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