

“HOW CAN I GIVE YOU UP?”

Hosea 11:1-12:14

Key Verse: 11:8

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

One day C. H. Spurgeon was walking through the English countryside with a friend. As they strolled along, the evangelist noticed a barn with a weather vane on its roof. At the top of the vane were these words: God is love. Spurgeon told his companion that he thought this was a rather inappropriate place for such a message. “Weather vanes are changeable,” he said, “but God’s love is constant.” “I don’t agree with you, Charles,” replied his friend. “You misunderstood the meaning. That sign is indicating a truth: Regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love.”

In today’s passage we are going to look at God’s love and realize that love is more than just words. God’s love is an everlasting and unfailing love. Only by understanding and knowing his love for us can we then begin to realize the deeper meaning of love. The Bible says in 1 John 4:10, *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* God sacrificed his son on our behalf so that we might love him.

I. GOD’S LOVE FOR ISRAEL (11:1-11)

Look at verse 1. *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”* God here pictures himself as a father who loves his children dearly. The people of Israel were his precious children. When they were slaves in Egypt, he heard their cries and delivered them from the hands of the Pharaoh. He protected them in the wilderness for 40 years. God delivered them to the Promised Land.

Hosea further describes this relationship in verse 3. *“It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.”* If you are parents like me, you may remember your joy and excitement when your child smiled for the first time or took his or her first step. Spiritually Israel was like a helpless baby when they came out of Egypt. They were full of slave mentality and had no spiritual desires. So God gave them the laws and regulations to teach them the basic elements of faith and human life. God’s prophets taught them how to walk in the way of the Lord. Like a father who sits by the bedside of his sick child keeping watch through the night, God was with his people when they were suffering because of their sins.

Let’s read verse 4 together. *“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.”* God saved Israel from the heavy yoke of slavery and bondage from Egypt. He led them with compassion and love. He wasn’t like those Egyptians who laid heavy burden on them and controlled and forced them to do things with whips. God’s chain is a cord of kindness and ties of love. For the forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites often disobeyed and committed many terrible sins against him. However, whenever they repented, God generously forgave them. He was always slow to anger but quick to forgive. Every day except the Sabbath days, the Israelites could go out and pick up food from the ground to eat. When they complained about the manna, God gave them quail until they became sick of meat.

But what was their reaction to such great love of God? Look at verse 2. *“But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.”* They forgot about God and went away from him further and further. When they got into the land of milk and honey, a land of prosperity and wealth, they forgot about God. They said to themselves, “Well, we’ve got enough. We don’t need God anymore.” They didn’t have to go out day after day and collect manna off the ground. Worse than that, they followed after foreign gods and idols. When they saw many idols and images that their neighbors were worshiping, they liked them. Those idols looked more convenient, fun, and attractive. They could now choose and own their own gods, which promised to give them material blessings and physical pleasures without guilt. So they quickly abandoned their God and instead chose whatever idols they liked as people today trade in their old cars for new ones. They thought that they had a good deal.

Look at verses 5-7. In these verses Hosea prophesies what would happen to Israel when they abandoned their God and stubbornly refused to repent. Instead of prosperity and success, there would be only destructions and fearful foreign invasions. The Assyrian armies would wipe out city after city and destroy everything. When they refused to be led with cords of kindness and ties of God’s love, they now had to face heavy and cruel yoke of foreign nations. Then you may ask how a loving God could allow those foreign nations to invade and rule his people. It was because God didn’t want to deny his people the opportunity to grow up through facing the consequences of their rebellion and sin.

Let’s read verse 8 together. *How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.* God is relentlessly loving and his love won’t let his people go. Although he had to judge and punish them, he could never give up on them or hand them over to total destruction. He couldn’t do to Ephraim what he did to the two cities mentioned, Admah and Zeboiim. These were cities next to Sodom and Gomorrah. (Dt 29:23) The people were as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah and removed from the face of the earth.

Look at the end of verse 8 again. *My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.* Here God says all his compassion is aroused, not anger. We learned from the previous chapters how God asked Hosea to go and buy back his unfaithful and adulterous wife. So also the Lord God would go and buy his people back. His compassion was aroused for them. What a thing God asked Hosea to do. What great love the Lord revealed to this children!

Look at verse 9. *I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man— the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.* Instead of anger God comes with compassion. We are quick to sin and anger, but slow to repent and forgive. But our God is not like us but holy and gracious. His love endures forever. In many ways we are like the Israelites. We may not have carved images or golden calves, but we know deep in our hearts that how often we have been unfaithful to him and how we tried to worship the things of this world because the world says that is what we need to do. But the great love of God for sinners like us turns us around and brings us back. His everlasting and enduring love gives us strength and power to do God’s work.

Look at verses 10-11. They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes,” declares

the LORD. Here we can find God's hope and vision for his people. God looks forward to the day they would show honor and holy fear of God. I thought of the picture that I saw in the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the loving roar of Aslan and the children trembling with hope and joy before that roar.

II. ISRAEL' DECEIT; GOD'S GRACE (11:12-12:14)

Starting from verse 11:12, Hosea uses the story of Jacob to teach what God wants to see happen to Israel. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, the son of Isaac, and the father of the twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. His name was later changed to Israel.

Look at verse 12:3. Even before Jacob came out of his mother's womb, he tried to cheat his twin brother Esau. His birth name means, "He grasps the heel," though it really means "deceive." And he lived down to his own name, stealing his brothers' birthright and then manipulating his father Isaac to give him the blessing of the first-born. Fearing for his life, Jacob left home and escaped to Aram to live with his uncle Laban. One night on that trip, Jacob had a dream. He saw a ladder from heaven to earth with angels ascending and descending. In that dream God assured him of a greater birthright than he had manipulated from his brother Esau. Jacob had not expected to meet God there. He wasn't searching for God, and he certainly had done nothing to deserve the blessing that God wanted to give him. Jacob was deeply moved by this dream, and he built an altar and even made a vow. (12:4) Even though it was a very selfish and conditional vow, God accepted it and used it to bring him back later.

When Jacob arrived in Aram, he fell in love with Laban's daughter Rachel and struck a bargain with Laban. (12) However Laban deceived him at the wedding and he ended up working for his sly uncle for 20 years. Finally, one day he secretly escaped with all his wealth and left for Canaan. However as he approached Canaan, he felt a growing sense of fear and panic at the thought of meeting Esau after all he had done to him. So that night he went to Jabbok River and there he wrestled with God all night. (12:3) As the night was coming to an end, God dislocated Jacob's hip. God did that so he couldn't fight anymore because he wouldn't let God go until God blessed him. Why did he want God's blessing? It was because he knew without God's blessing his life was empty and miserable. Jacob knew that though he had worked hard including many tricks and manipulations, he had succeeded because of God's blessing. He wanted God's living presence in his life. He wanted to be a spiritual man.

As a result of Jacob's encounter with God, he was given a new name. No longer was he "the deceiver," or "the manipulator." Now he was Israel, "one who struggles with God." Not only was Jacob's name changed; his inner life and character were also changed. He began a new life as a spiritual man.

The transformation of Jacob is exactly what Hosea sees that both the northern and southern kingdoms need. Both were equally guilty of deceit and manipulation. (11:12) Instead of depending on God, they rather used their dirty political and diplomatic tricks and manipulations to secure their power. They sought after power and material wealth but showed no interest in God's blessing. When they became rich they boasted that they would be secure and safe from God's judgment. (7-8) However God wanted them to turn to him, be honest before him and meet him the way Jacob did. (6) God also warned them that the consequences of ignoring God's love would be fatal and devastating.

Like Jacob, all of us also have to have a Jabbok encounter. Our Jabbok is when we are completely honest with God and we confess our patterns of dishonesty, impatience, stubbornness and pretending to be things we're not. As I prepare this message, I realize that in many ways I am much like Jacob. I have lived periods of my life without God's peace and blessing because I wouldn't give in and I wanted to be in charge of my life. I thank God that he helps me to learn to be humble and trust in him. May God help me to learn to wait for him and be humble before him.

In this passage, we learned that the love of God is enduring and everlasting. Despite his people's terrible sins, he was willing to forgive and restore them. As someone said, God is crazy about you and me. May God help us to know and understand his deep love for us so that we may love him and also love each other.

(by Caleb Lee)