

# Return to Love and Justice

**Bible Background • HOSEA 11–12 | Printed Text • HOSEA 11:1–2, 7–10; 12:1–2, 6–14**  
**Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 8:11–20**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPARE prosperity as a worldly goal with the godly virtues of love and justice; REGRET the occasions where we have made material prosperity a greedy, covetous goal; and PRACTICE love and justice as key virtues.

## In Focus

Sixteen-year-old twins Briana and Jackson and their family just wanted some warm food. Their father had lost his job, and their mom was sick. They wanted to eat and would volunteer to clean up in exchange for food. The twins left their two-bedroom apartment and their two siblings to find the family food.

They stopped at a church a few blocks away and asked if the church was still serving meals. The church said they were but the kitchen closed in 20 minutes. Jackson ran back to tell everyone, but their mother was too weak to go inside. Their father stayed with her and told the other kids to go. The children thought they would ask to take food for their parents.

To their surprise, they were told they could not take extras. Briana and Jackson managed to sneak bread and fruit in their pockets. The church's sign read, "We Are A Caring Church." Briana said, "They sure don't represent the care of God too well. Maybe the church down the street with the broken sign that simply read "All Are Welcome" might mean it."

*Have you ever met or experienced rejection from people who claim to love the Lord? How are churches and believers guilty of saying they love the Lord, but not always displaying their love in genuine and meaningful ways?*

## Keep in Mind

**"Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually" (Hosea 12:6, KJV).**

## Focal Verses

**KJV** 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

12:1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

**NLT** 11: 1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt.

2 But the more I called to him, the farther he moved from me, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols.

7 For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me.

8 “Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows.

9 No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy.

10 For someday the people will follow me. I, the LORD, will roar like a lion. And when I roar, my people will return trembling from the west.

12:1 The people of Israel feed on the wind; they chase after the east wind all day long. They pile up lies and violence; they are making an alliance with Assyria while sending olive oil to buy support from Egypt.

2 Now the LORD is bringing charges against Judah. He is about to punish Jacob for all his deceitful ways, and pay him back for all he has done.

6 So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him.

7 But no, the people are like crafty merchants selling from dishonest scales—they love to cheat.

8 Israel boasts, “I am rich! I've made a fortune all by myself! No one has caught me cheating! My record is spotless!”

9 But I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. And I will make you live in tents again, as you do each year at the Festival of Shelters.

**10** I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

**11** Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

**12** And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.

**13** And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.

**14** Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him.

**10** I sent my prophets to warn you with many visions and parables.”

**11** But the people of Gilead are worthless because of their idol worship. And in Gilgal, too, they sacrifice bulls; their altars are lined up like the heaps of stone along the edges of a plowed field.

**12** Jacob fled to the land of Aram, and there he earned a wife by tending sheep.

**13** Then by a prophet the LORD brought Jacob’s descendants out of Egypt; and by that prophet they were protected.

**14** But the people of Israel have bitterly provoked the LORD, so their LORD will now sentence them to death in payment for their sins.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Hosea.** One of the minor prophets. He was an Old Testament prophet of the eighth century BC, called by God from the northern kingdom. He prophesied about the last forty years before the fall of the northern kingdom, warning the Israelites to return to God before it was too late. He was an older contemporary of Isaiah and Micah and began His ministry at a time when Israel was prosperous and powerful under King Jeroboam II (790–749 BC).

## Background

The book of Hosea illustrates a time when the people of Israel had been unfaithful to God through worship. They sought out relationships with Assyria and Egypt that were not approved by God, all in pursuit of military gain, and subjected themselves to improper worship of Baal. Throughout the story of Hosea, God has shown His commitment to the people of Israel, and yet they continue to both reject His love and disobey His commands. The northern kingdom

managed only two centuries remaining vibrant and alive, in large part because its leaders failed to teach the people of Israel how to seek and follow after God. Hosea predicted the downfall of Israel when Shalmaneser of Assyria conquered it and shortly after Judah went into captivity. In many ways, today’s passages show how God is lamenting the frustrations of a people who continued to defile the meaning of worship. In chapter 12, Jacob, who later was renamed Israel, practiced deceit and yet was the common ancestor of all the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob, however, diligent in his desire to seek God, wrestled with the angel to receive his blessings. Jacob’s ancestors named in this text remained under the belief that their benefits would be a direct result of their success, without help from God. Jacob attempted to cleanse his home of idol worship (Genesis 35:2); however, his decedents remained steadfast in their worshiping of idols. As result, dishonesty, as noted by Jacob’s past, became the norm in how people attained their wealth.

## At-A-Glance

1. Israel's Deliverance (Hosea 11:1–2)
2. God's Reaffirming Love (vv. 7–10)
3. The Punishment of Israel (12:1–2)
4. Seek God's Love and Justice (vv. 6–14)

### In Depth

#### 1. Israel's Deliverance (Hosea 11:1–2)

God has in many ways envisioned the relationship that He maintained with Israel as similar to that of a parent and a stubborn child. God reemphasizes the love He possesses for His children despite the many times that the children of Israel continuously disobeyed God even after being brought out of Egypt (vv. 1–2). God continued to restore the people of Israel, and in many ways, this sets up the narrative for the Messiah that would come and offer reconciliation and hope.

*What does the hope of a Messiah (Jesus) offer to the future of the people of Israel?*

#### 2. God's Reaffirming Love (vv. 7–10)

God reminds the Israelites what happened to Admah and Zeboim (NLT: Zeboiim), who both perished with Sodom and Gomorrah, yet God refuses to allow that to happen to the people of Israel. God remains adamant in His refusal to destroy Israel by reaffirming love and not anger. Instead of God's wrath (which would have been justified), God states that His "compassion is aroused." This is a reminder to the people of Israel of God's divine position. We cannot place our definitions of human characteristics onto how we understand God's behavior. God is infinitely larger than we could imagine, so when we note God's love despite our disobedience, we cannot attempt to rationalize it with our human understanding. God believed in the return of faithful people (vv. 10–11).

*How do we come to understand God's divine love through His relationship with the people of Israel?*

#### 3. The Punishment of Israel (12:1–2)

At different times, Assyria and Egypt each conquered Israel and held their people captive, yet Israel still tries to make alliances and trade deals with them. Israel continues to use all forms of deceit and violence in pursuit of power. In many ways, these actions remain in direct conflict to the bondage that they were set free from as a people. Pursuit of their wishes and desires caused the people of Israel to fall. God at this moment is calling out Jacob and the people of Israel for their deceit and the deceit of his descendants who believed that their successes came from their works. God is now calling to bring a charge against the people of Israel; however, this charge is coming from His continued love for them.

*Do you think that it would have been better to have the people of Israel destroyed to understand the seriousness of their actions?*

#### 4. Seek God's Love and Justice (vv. 6–14)

God urges the people of Israel once again to return to the ways of love and justice. They must put away the deceit and harm they have displayed since their release from Egypt. The boasting of riches and wealth is not rooted in justice or love, nor does it carry weight in God's kingdom. God reminds the Israelites of the Festival of Booths, a time when they spend a week living in tents to honor God's protection when they wandered the wilderness for forty years. However, God warns the people of Israel that if they continue to live in such a way that glorifies material success and idol worship, they would be sent back to the tents and placed in bondage.

*How can one obtain wealth in a way that is still affirming of God's love and justice?*

## Search the Scriptures

1. How does Israel try to establish their own prosperity apart from God (Hosea 12:1)?
2. Usually, people run from the roar of a lion. What will hearers do when they hear God's lion-like roar (Hosea 11:10)?

## Discuss the Meaning

1. Note the times in your life where you found yourself disobeying God and idolizing other things. How did God extend His love and mercy to you even at that time?
2. How do you understand success in any area of your life as it relates to your relationship with God?
3. Do you find yourself seeking love and justice even if the people and communities you love initially reject you?

## Liberating Lesson

There are individuals and corporations in this country who continue to profit from deceit and improper business practices. These individuals and corporations find themselves hoping to obtain worldly wealth and prosperity. Meanwhile, they continue to widen the wealth gap globally. Their desire to achieve power, status, and wealth by human means has allowed them to lose sight of the destruction that they are causing to working class and poor people. In many ways, God is still calling out to them, both in love and strong rebuke. God desires all His children; even those that operate in deceit and material wealth, to bring justice and restore good order. We can often find ourselves seeking to obtain the material wealth of millionaires, meanwhile forgetting the reasons God blesses us with wealth in the first place. We have been given wealth so that we may extend back the same love God has shown us and share it among the least of these and work toward restorative economic justice.

## Application for Activation

Always seek God daily in every aspect of your life. Ensure that you are keeping God at the head of your life (Matthew 6:33). Ask yourself, what are you faithful to? What do you find yourself idolizing? You can also examine if the blessings that God has provided you should be redistributed to those around you in need. Lastly, seek to trust God to continue being a provider in your life and not to trust in your own ability to provide.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

**Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10; 12:1–2, 6–14**

Prophet Hosea lived during the tragic final days of Israel, the Northern Kingdom before their exile to Assyria. The book uses a number of symbols to depict Israel's unfaithfulness on the one hand, and God's gracious, merciful, and persistently loving character on the other. It uses marriage and parenting