

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HOSEA 11-14

One night, when my son was just a little guy, Nick, was pushing his limits, testing his father's patience.

Finally, I brought out the wooden spoon. In fact, I was just about to apply *the board of education to the seat of learning*, when suddenly, my teary-eyed son, looks at me, and with a quiver in his voice, says, "Dad, after you spank me will you give me a great big hug?"

Awwwwww! What a heart-melting, anger-diffusing, daddy-disarming comment. Of course I told him "yes." Then guess what I did? I spanked him like I promised!

I wasn't about to let him charm his way out of some needed correction. I love my kids - and I showed them love everyday - but part of love is disciplining them when needed. The spankings were proof of my love.

And this was true in God's dealings with His people, Israel. God employed both *warm hugs AND wooden spoons* - both *compassion and correction*.

One was never there without the other. When God administered judgment it didn't mean His love had vanished. Likewise, when God promised a warm hug He wasn't throwing away His wooden spoon.

God's love and God's discipline were synonymous.

In Chapters 4-10 of Hosea, though God's love is present, the dominate theme is His judgment.

But now in Chapter 11 the tone changes, though God's judgment is still on the horizon, He speaks more of His love. God expresses His divine desire to restore the Jews once their judgment was complete. God promises His kids *a warm hug after the wooden spoon.*

Chapter 11 begins, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” God adopted Israel out of Egypt. They went from slaves to sons.

And the same can be said for you and I. God doesn't forgive and cleanse you, just to send you on your way. He frees us from sin's slavery to make us His family.

God's calling is always two-sided. God *calls us out* to *call us in* - out of this world, and into His family.

It sent a marvelous message to the Hebrews when Hosea implied that God was their father. But the NT Jesus takes the idiom even further. In the OT the term was applied to the entire nation - never to an individual.

This is why the Jews in the first century considered it irreverent, even blasphemous, to hear Jesus refer to God as “My Father.” This assumed a closer intimacy with God than anyone before Him had ever enjoyed.

But what really angered the Jews was when Jesus taught His followers they too could refer to God in the same intimate way, “our Father.” Remember His words, “When you pray, say, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” In John 20:17, after His resurrection Jesus told them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and Your God.” Jesus gave to us the same access to God He possessed.

It's very interesting, and somewhat odd, that the NT quotes verse 1 as a prophecy of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus' return from Egypt. When King Herod heard a rival king was born in Bethlehem, he tried to kill Him.

Warned in a dream Joseph, moved to Egypt. But upon Herod's death, God called Joseph to return and settle in Nazareth. Matthew 2:14-15 reads, "When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, *"Out of Egypt I called My Son."* The context in Hosea is speaking of the nation, while Matthew's quote applies it to Jesus.

Apparently, Matthew saw a picture of the Messiah in the nation Israel. There are places in the OT where Israel was a type of the Messiah. Remember Messiah came to identify with His people Israel. He came to share in their plight and bring them God's deliverance!

Jesus and Israel were called out of Egypt.

Verse 2, "As they called them, so they went from them; they sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images." A *fall* came soon after their *call*.

No sooner had the Hebrews entered the Promised Land that they abandoned the true God for empty idols. The "*Baals*" were the local Canaanite gods.

This clearly grieved the Father's heart.

He says, “I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them.”

God was like a *doting dad*... You've seen the type.

They're preoccupied with their kids. The child's first roll, their first tooth, their first spoonful of cereal - all are occurrences of monumental importance - they rival world events - they have to be documented on video.

And the one developmental landmark this dad relishes most is the moment when his little guy takes that first step on his own. Months earlier, he started the process... holding him under his arms - tottering him from one leg to the other mimicking a walking motion - he was teaching his son to walk. Yet this was like God.

He loved “*Ephraim*” - a nickname for the northern tribes of Israel - as He loves all His children, *including you*. Our God is a Father preoccupied with His kids.

Think of it, God can't keep his eyes off you!

Our Father lights up at all your firsts... the first time you open your Bible to read it for yourself... the first time you share your faith... your first attempt to serve in the church... God rejoices! He treasures that video!

What causes heaven to applaud isn't the signing of a peace treaty among nations, or the victory of a sports team - heaven rejoices when a child of God takes his or her first step of faith! God wants to teach His kids to walk... *by faith, and with holiness, and in the Spirit*.

Verse 4 describes God's attempts to teach Ephraim to walk. “I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was

to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.” In an agrarian society everyone understood this picture. Oxen were normally harassed in pairs - yoked together for work.

They were steered by the bit and bridle.

Likewise God had authority over His people. A mark of a follower of Jesus is someone who has accepted the bit - who allows the Master to steer His direction.

Rebellion is to spit the bit, or reject God’s guidance.

Yet here Hosea paints a picture of God's gentleness and love. Rather than a stern taskmaster, He's a tender trainer. Instead of driving, He leads and feeds.

He takes away our heavy burdens. He relieves - not frazzles. He gives His people rest - not more stress.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 11:29-30, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Our Lord’s *yoke never chokes*. He doesn’t yank us or jerk us around. He’s a loving leader. The reins He holds are bands of love - they’re gentle cords. God is able to *tame our will* without *breaking our spirit*. He patiently draws us in and persuades us of His ways.

Verse 5, “He shall not return to the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to repent.” God wanted to heal His people, but rather than trust in Him they put their faith in neighboring nations.

They flip-flopped back and forth between Egypt and Assyria. Eventually the Assyrians became their ruler.

“And the sword shall slash in his cities, devour his districts, and consume them, because of their own counsels. My people are bent on backsliding from Me.”

Israel was “bent on backsliding.” Beware of a reverse momentum - a spiritual backdraft. Don't get caught in the current of this world that flows downstream from God. Every Christian faces the dangers of drifting.

Realize, living the Christian life is like climbing a sliding board in your socks. You're moving upwards or you're sliding downwards, but there's no standing still.

Ever been on a float out in the ocean and dozed off? When you awoke you found yourself in deep water.

The same can happen in the Christian life. The tides of compromise take the aimless drifter further and further from Christ, until they wake up in big trouble.

Years ago, Bible teacher, Dan Dehaan identified **ten steps to drifting**. It starts with **laziness**, then there's **boredom or lack of purpose**, **restlessness**, **self-pity**, **pride**, **murmuring**, **impurity**, **a hatred of correction**, **bitterness and resentment**, and finally **a hard heart**.

And here's the big question, how far have you drifted from the Lord? It's time to head in as fast as possible.

Hosea continues, “**Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him.**” They pray, but there's no praise. The people of Israel have lost their passion for God.

“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim?” Admah and Zeboim were two of the five cities in the Dead Sea basin destroyed in God’s judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Here God knows what’s coming on Israel. He’s going to judge and discipline His people, but He doesn’t want to drop the hammer. Listen to the pain of God’s heart, “My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.”

Hosea 11:8 is to me one of the most stirring verses in the Bible. Israel is bent on backsliding and needs to be judged. Something has to be done. But the thought of letting harm come to Israel breaks God’s heart.

The Almighty says, “My heart churns within Me...”

Even when God judges His people, don’t ever think He doesn’t love them. In the midst of His judgments, God gets emotional. One author says of this verse, “a cry of love escapes...” Don’t think of God as a vindictive judge. He’s like Hosea - He’s a jilted lover - hoping to renew His marriage to a rebellious bride.

God is like a heart-torn parent, resorting to some tough love in His attempts at restoring a wayward child.

Every time my dad spanked me he would first say, “Sandy, this is going to hurt me more than its going to hurt you.” And I thought, “Sure, easy for you to say.” Hey, I never believed my dad until I became a dad!

I hated disciplining my kids. I'd rather Kathy do it, if it had to be done. My heart churned, my sympathy stirred. I love my kids and never like to see them suffer.

And this is how God feels when He has to spank us. He hates it, but He does it because He loves us.

Be glad He doesn't wimp out like many parents. **God always does *what's best for us even if it's hard on Him*.** Those of us who are parents should follow His cue.

Verse 9, **"I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst; and I will not come with terror."** God will destroy Ephraim. He's not changing his mind. *But He will not destroy her again.*

Ephraim will one day be restored. Here, the Prophet Hosea is looking forward to the end of time.

"They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. when He roars, then His sons shall come trembling from the west..." Note, the Lord **"will roar like a lion."** *When is the Lord referred to as a lion?* The Messiah, our Lord Jesus, is called **the lion of Judah!**

It seems when Jesus returns millions of Jews in the west - many no doubt from America - will return to Israel and worship their Messiah - *their roaring lion!*

"They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses," says the Lord. **"Ephraim has encircled Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah still walks with**

God, even with the Holy One who is faithful.” The NK had been guilty of lying to God - of making hollow promises.

They were like the eskimo boy who said to his sweetheart, “I would push my dog team one-hundred miles through ice and snow just to see you today.”

The girl replied, “Aw, that's a lot of mush.” Ephraim's promises were nothing but mush. Israel told lies.

Whereas, “*Judah still walked with God.*” At the time of the fall of Samaria in the north, Hezekiah was king of Judah, and Isaiah was God’s prophet. They led the SK in repentance and revival. Though hope for Israel was over, Judah would be spared the Assyrian invasion.

Chapter 12 tells us, “Ephraim feeds on the wind, and pursues the east wind; he daily increases lies and desolation.” Blistering winds, sandstorms, blow across Arabian deserts. Hosea compares it to the Assyrians.

“Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt.” Israel put more confidence in Assyria than they did in God. They sought peace with their avowed enemies. And if they’re concessions to Assyria didn’t work, they made a back-up alliance with Egypt. In the end, neither nation came to their defense.

“The Lord also brings a charge against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will recompense him.” In verses 2-6 God judges Jacob and his shady dealings with Esau. These verses apply Jacob of old to Israel in Hosea’s day.

“He took his brother by the heel in the womb...” The animosity between the two brothers began before they were born. “And in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed (although the Angel crippled his hip); he wept, and sought favor from Him.” Remember, Jacob was afraid of Esau. He thought his brother was out to kill him.

When Jacob returned to the land of his fathers he encountered a man just east of the Jordan. He thought it was Esau. He was fighting for His life. But in the midst of the struggle He realized his adversary wasn't Esau at all, but the Angel of the Lord. When Jacob realized he was fighting with God, he changed his posture. Rather than resist, he hung on with all his might. He cried out for a blessing - which God granted.

And this might be your story. All your life you've struggled. Circumstances have gotten you down. You have fought with your boss, your wife, your kids... Has it ever dawned on you, you might be fighting with God?

Could it be you need to surrender to *His* will?

Despite what you may've thought God is not your adversary, He's your friend. God wants to bless you.

When we think of Jacob a special place comes to mind. God met Jacob twice at Bethel. Once when he left the Promised land - and showed him a ladder to heaven. And once when He returned, when God renewed to Jacob the covenant He made to Abraham.

Yet the Hebrews in Hosea's day didn't remember the lessons God taught Jacob. Hosea writes, "He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us - that is, the Lord God of hosts. The Lord is His memorable name."

Notice God left His people, not an image like the pagan gods, but a "*memorable name.*" God's name reflects His nature. "Yahweh" means "I am that I am." He's "The great I am." God is the self-existent One.

Verse 6, "So you, by the help of your God, return; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually." Hosea has referred to three key events from the life of Jacob, that the prophet applied to the nation as a whole. In a sense, when He was born, and when He died, and when He was born again.

The word "*Jacob*" means "heel-catcher." This was the name given to him at birth. He came out of the womb holding his twin brother, Esau, by the heel.

The animosity between them started in-utero. From the day he was born Jacob wanted to be first. He wasn't content playing second-fiddle. He wanted his father's birthright - even if it took deception to get it. He put fur on his arms pretending to be his hairy brother.

After swindling Esau, Jacob fled to Haran where he worked for a man named Laban for twenty years and two wives. Yet Laban was a bigger cheat than Jacob.

Remember the horror story, the morning after his wedding Jacob awoke, rolled over to kiss his bride, and screamed, "Mama Mia, it's Leah." Jacob learned what it was like to be the *swindled*, not just the *swindler*.

So when he decided to return home he was afraid. He wondered what kind of reception his brother would give him. He feared Esau would want to fight.

One night, by the Jabbok River, just east of the Jordan (*we'll be visiting the site in a few days*) Jacob encountered a stranger. He thought this fellow was his brother Esau. The two men began to wrestle.

Old, Jake the Snake went into action. He had been wrestling all his life. His whole life had been a battle to trust God, to let God work out His will in His way.

Little did Jake realize but this stranger wasn't Esau. He was a messenger from the Lord. I believe Jacob wrestled with *Jesus*. The heel-catcher wrestled all night physically, just as he had wrestled all his life spiritually.

Jake was putting up a pretty good fight when just before day break the angel touched him on the thigh and dislocated his hip. Instantly Jacob realized He'd been wrestling with God. Jacob grabbed God just as tightly as he had grabbed his brother's heel. He cried out to God and ask for His blessing upon His life.

That night Jacob came to a startling realization. The blessing He'd longed for was not achieved by *his hand*.

The contentment and peace He'd strived for wasn't found in beating the other guy - in winning - but in losing. God blessed Jacob when he surrendered.

And Jacob walked with a limp the rest of his life. Like Paul's thorn in the flesh - his crippled hip was a gift from God. It was

a subtle reminder that his job - and ours as well - is to trust in God's strength, not our own.

The last incident from Jacob's life, referred to by Hosea, in verse 6, was his experience at Bethel. After Jacob's wrestling match at the Jabbok, God told him to go to Bethel, the place where Jacob had first met God.

The name "*Bethel*" means "*house of God.*"

At Bethel, Jacob and his house put away their idols - cleansed themselves - and changed their garments.

The same three things that happen today when a person comes to Christ. We turn our backs on the false gods we once worshipped. We're cleansed by the blood of Christ. And God clothes us in the Lord's righteousness. Jesus is our Bethel, our "*house of God.*"

Jacob's running is now over. He's dwelling in the house of God. And at Bethel he gets a new name.

He's no longer called "*Jacob*" or "*heel-catcher,*" but now God calls him "*Israel*" or "*Governed by God.*"

Hosea encourages Ephraim to learn from his father Jacob. He went from **rebellion towards God** to **wrestling with God** to **resting in God**. Whereas, the Israel of Hosea's day was heading in the opposite direction. Like Jacob they were wrestling with God and didn't know it. They needed to surrender to His will.

We all need to stop wrestling and start resting!

Verse 7, "*A cunning Canaanite! Deceitful scales are in his hand; he loves to oppress.*" God calls Israel a "*cunning*

Canaanite.” The Canaanites were the pagans who lived in the land before God gave it to the Hebrews. Israel had acted like idolatrous pagans.

Especially when it came to dirty business practices like rigged, unbalanced scales. They were cheats.

“And Ephraim said, ‘Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that is sin.’ “But I am the Lord your God, ever since the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast.” The feast Hosea refers to here is Tabernacles. To this day, Jews are suppose to spend a week outside their houses living under a tent. It’s a reminder of their wandering in the wilderness for forty years, and how God preserved and provided for them.

Yet because of the haughtiness of the Hebrews in Hosea’s day, and the confidence they had in their own wealth, God will force His people to live again in tents - not just during an annual feast - but permanently.

“I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets.” We've noted from Isaiah to Hosea - how God communicated through the Hebrew prophets - sometimes by **sermon**, other times by **skit**.

Often God called on the prophets to act out the message He’d given them through dramatic displays.

Hosea himself was called on to marry a prostitute.

Verse 11, “Though Gilead has idols - surely they are vanity - though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal, indeed their altars shall be heaps in the furrows of the field.”

From Gilead in the Golan, the northern mountains, to Gilgal in the south, the land just above the Dead Sea, idolatry had permeated all the NK at the time of Hosea.

“Jacob fled to the country of Syria; Israel served for a spouse, and for a wife he tended sheep.” Again, a reference to Jacob. Jacob the person, is a type of the people - the man Jacob is a type of the nation Israel.

“By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved. Ephraim provoked Him to anger most bitterly; therefore his Lord will leave the guilt of his bloodshed upon him, and return his reproach upon him.” God proved His faithfulness to His people by delivering them from Egypt and preserving them for 700 years. The judgment that’s about to come is because they provoked God with their wickedness.

Chapter 13, “When Ephraim spoke, trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended through Baal worship, he died.” When Ephraim was humble before God, he prospered. When Ephraim rejected God for idols - when He offended God, he died to God.

“Now they sin more and more, and have made for themselves molded images, idols of their silver, according to their skill; all of it is the work of craftsmen.” How foolish it is to worship the work of your own hands. Not just “*molded*

images,” but a career, or a house, or a bank account, or fame, or a reputation.

You can make a foolish idol out of anything. As we’re told in Psalm 100:3, “It is God who has made us and not we ourselves.” This is what Jacob learned.

“They say of them, “Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!” According to Ripley’s Believe It Or Not, the record for the longest kiss ever is held by a couple from Thailand - 58 hours, 35 minutes, and 58 seconds.

Their lips were locked and never broke contact. They had to stand up, and stay awake for the entire kiss.

But Hosea would question this record for the longest kiss. For in God’s estimation Israel kissed the golden calves for 200 years, the duration of their idolatry.

We think of a kiss as a romantic gesture, but a kiss is often used as an act of homage, reverence, or worship.

Even today Jews kiss the Torah scrolls as an act of reverence. Muslims kiss a Koran for the same reason.

It bugged me when the Patriots kissed the Lombardi Trophy after winning the Super Bowl. Perhaps for some of them it was an act of worship. In ancient times a kiss was an expression of allegiance. Thus when a person approached the king, he would kiss his ring.

When Judas kissed Jesus it was a mock gesture of worship. A kiss carries with it spiritual significance.

All this talk of kissing reminds me of a boy who asked a girl for a kiss. She replied, "Sorry, but I have scruples." He said, "That's okay, I've been vaccinated."

Or the girl who asked her boyfriend, "Is it true I'm the only girl you've ever kissed?" He replied, "Yes, and the prettiest too." Well, Israel thought nothing of kissing the calf. God considered it worshipping false gods.

God had hoped His people would be faithful to Him, but as it turned out, Israel lacked spiritual scruples.

And my question to us is what have we been kissing? Where have we directed our affections?

Have you been smooching with an idolatrous, wicked world, or have we been reserving our kisses for Christ?

Psalm 2:12 warns us, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way." I hope you're reserving your affections for God's Son and our Savior.

Verse 3, "Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney." Clouds, dew, chaff, and smoke are all fleeting and transitory. Here one moment, gone the next. Such will be the immediate longevity of Israel.

"Yet I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me." Here's a great proof-text for the deity of Jesus. Hosea 13:4 declares there is no savior but Yahweh, yet the NT identifies Jesus as the only Savior. You can't reconcile

Hosea with the NT without admitting that Jesus and Yahweh are the same person.

Verse 5, “I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. When they had pasture, they were filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me. “So I will be to them like a lion; like a leopard by the road I will lurk; I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs; I will tear open their rib cage, and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them.” Hosea provides a poetic picture of the savage destruction coming upon Israel. He uses animals to symbolize nations and invading armies.

And I don't think it's a coincidence the four animals here correspond to the animals that appear in Daniel 7.

In Daniel's vision the lion, the bear, the leopard, and the wild beast referred to four succeeding Gentile world-ruling empires: [Babylon](#), [Persia](#), [Greece](#), [Rome](#).

Verse 9, “O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. I will be your King; where is any other, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes’?

I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath.” What an incredible statement. The eternal God has a broad perspective. He sees the climax of the NK in the same sentence as the kingdom's advent.

God wanted to be Israel's king, yet His people demanded a king like the nations around them. It was against God's better judgment. He knew what would happen if they had an earthly

ruler. But He also knew they had to see for themselves - learn the hard way.

Now 400 years later it's happened. Because of their nineteen wicked rulers judgment has come. *"I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath."*

Ironically, today the Jews still want a man to rule over them. They're looking for a Messiah. This is going to lead them to embrace the Antichrist. They'll see him as their Savior. But they too will learn the hard way!

Verse 12, *"The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is stored up. The sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon him. He is an unwise son, for he should not stay long where children are born."*

God's judgment will be like birth pangs. It will come suddenly, with great intensity - but it won't last long.

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes." For centuries Israel was ransomed by the blood of the sacrifice, but here God says, *"I will ransom them... I will redeem them..."*

The day will come when God will ransom His people from the jaws of death and the mouth of the grave.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:55 Paul echoes this verse from Hosea, and explains how God will accomplish His redemption from death, *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

The resurrection of Jesus transformed man's most bitter enemy, death, into a mere technicality. Today we face death knowing that Jesus has conquered it. The grave no longer holds us. We share in His resurrection!

“Though he is fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come; the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness. Then his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up. He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize. Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child **ripped open.**” This was fulfilled by the invading Assyrian army in 722 BC.

Chapter 14, O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words with you, and return to the Lord. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.” This is a vital verse, “*Take words with you*” and deal with your sinful ways.

Come to God and ***bring words with you.*** Our **confession** plays an important role in our **salvation.**

Romans 10:10 reads, “**With the mouth confession is made to salvation.**” Jesus said, “**Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**” What’s in the heart comes out of the mouth. 1 John 1:9 tells us, “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**”

Once I was speaking to a person who remarked about their friend. "He knows that he's sinned, he just hasn't told it to God." At first the way she phrased it sounded strange, "*he hasn't told it to God.*" But this is exactly what Hosea is saying. When you come to God to repent and turn to Him, make sure you bring words.

"Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our gods.' For in You the fatherless finds mercy."

Too often this is the missing element in today's presentation of the Gospel. We encourage people to embrace Christ, but we don't make it clear they can't add Christ to a long list of other gods. Jesus demands not only that He's **first**, but that He's **only!** There's to be nothing else in my life that rivals my love for Jesus.

In Paul's day, he knew he spoke to a polytheistic people, and unless he was careful folks would embrace Jesus, but as just one of many gods. This is why he said of the Thessalonians they "**turned to God from idols.**" It's not enough to turn *to God* we also need to turn *from idols*. Remember 1 John 5:21, is a NT command, "**Little children, keep yourself from idols.**"

Verse 4, "**I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him.**"

It was Charles Spurgeon who use to say, "**God soon turns from His wrath, but He never turns from His love.**"

From time to time God is forced to judge our sin. He uses *the wooden spoon*, but He always follows it up with *the*

warmest hug. Psalm 30:5 says it best, “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

I’m sure we know, backsliding is painful. Often you don’t feel the splinters in life until you slide backwards. Yet God heals our backsliding. He loves us freely - *with no strings attached.* He wants to put away His anger.

“I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon.” Cedars from Lebanon were known throughout the ancient world.

“His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.” God will be like a sprawling cedar tree - a sweet shelter for His people.

These are wonderful verses. Look at all God promises His people. He’ll be a **refreshment** - like the morning dew - to His people. He provide **growth** - they will lengthen their roots. And **healing** - they’ll sprout olives. And **influence** - they’ll give off a sweet aroma.

And like amber waves of grain, His people will bring **glory and honor** God. They’ll also be known for their **fruitfulness** - like a vine. And their **joy** - like a wine.

Here’s how you heal a nation’s backsliding - by giving them *refreshment, growth, healing, influence, glory and honor, fruitfulness, and joy.* And God loves us freely. It costs us nothing, but the price of repentance.

An interesting statement is made in Luke 5:17, we're told, "It happened on a certain day, as (Jesus) was teaching, that... the power of the Lord was present to heal." It just happened that God was present to heal.

And it could be that tonight is one of those nights! God is here, and He's in the mood to heal. And not just cure us from our diseases, but from our backsliding.

This is the greater need.

Verse 8, "Ephraim shall say, 'What have I to do anymore with idols?' I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me."

God is looking forward to this day - in both the history of Israel and in our lives. When we've heard and observed God's ways, and His fruit is found in us.

Hosea closes, "Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them.

For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them."