

Monday, May 21 - Read Hosea 1-3. As God's prophet, Hosea's role was to show how the northern kingdom of Israel had been unfaithful to God, their "husband" and provider, and had married themselves to Baal and the gods of Canaan. He warned unless they repented of their sin and turned back to God, they were headed for destruction. Hosea spoke of God's characteristics – his powerful love and fierce justice – and how their practical experience of these should affect their lives and make them return to God. God often required extraordinary obedience from his prophets who were facing extraordinary times. God may ask you to do something difficult and extraordinary, too. If he does, how will you respond?

Tuesday, May 22 – Read Hosea 4-5. In these chapters, God brings a charge of disobedience against Israel. The religious leaders had failed to turn the people to God, and ritual prostitution had replaced right worship. The nation had declined spiritually and morally, breaking the laws that God had given them. The people found it easy to condemn Hosea's wife for her adultery. They were not so quick to see that *they* had been unfaithful to God. In this chapter, God accused the religious leaders of keeping people from knowing him. They also benefitted from the offerings people brought for their "sin offering." They ended up actually encouraging more sin. These are not the type of leaders the church needs. If the church leaders aren't pointing people to God, then they are pointing them to death.

Wednesday, May 23 - Read Hosea 6-8. One of Hosea's key themes is that Israel had broken the covenant God had made with them at Mount Sinai. God wanted to make Israel a blessing and a light to all nations; and if God's chosen people obeyed him and proclaimed him to the world, he would give them special blessings. If they broke the covenant, however, they would suffer severe penalties, as they should have known. Sadly, the people broke the agreement and proved themselves unfaithful to God. How about you? Have you also broken faith with God? What about your forgotten promises to serve him?

Thursday, May 24 – Read Hosea 9-10. By the time Israel began to experience the consequences of its sins, it was no longer listening to God's messengers. Refusing to hear the truth from prophet who spoke so clearly about its sins, the nation did not hear God's warnings about what was soon to happen. We all listen and read selectively – focusing on what seems to support our present life-style, ignoring what demands a radical reordering of our priorities. In doing this, we are likely to miss the warnings we need most. Listen to people who think your approach is all wrong. Read articles that present viewpoints you would be unlikely to take. Ask yourself, "Is God speaking to me through these speakers and writes? Is there something I need to change?" Israel prospered on Jeroboam II, gaining military and economic strength. But the more prosperous the nation became, the more love it lavished on idols. It seems as though the more God gives, the more we spend. We want bigger houses, better cars, and finer clothes. But the finest things the world offers line the pathway to destruction. As you prosper, consider where your money is going. Is it being used for God's purposes, or are you consuming it all on yourself?

Friday, May 25 – Read Hosea 11. In the final four chapters, Hosea shifts to the theme of God's intense love for Israel. God had always loved Israel as a parent loves a stubborn child, and that is why he would not release Israel from the consequences of its behavior. The Israelites were sinful, and they would be punished like a rebellious son brought by his parents before the elders. All through Israel's sad history, God repeatedly offered to restore the nation if it would only turn to him. By stubbornly refusing God's invitation, the northern kingdom had sealed its doom. It would be destroyed, never to rise again. Even so, Israel as a nation was not finished. A remnant of faithful Israelites would return to Jerusalem, where one day the Messiah would come, offering pardon and reconciliation to all who would faithfully follow him. **Read Hosea 12.** The two principles that Hosea called his nation to live by, love and justice, are at the very foundation of God's character. They are essential to his followers, but they are not easy to keep in balance. Some people are loving to the point that they excuse wrongdoing. Others are just to the extent that they forget love. Love without justice, because it's not aiming at a higher standard, leave people in their sins. Justice without love, because it has not heart, drives people away from God. To specialize in one at the expense of the other is to distort our witness. Today's church, just like Hosea's nation, must live by both principles.

Saturday, May 26 – Read Hosea 13-14. The people could return to God by asking him to forgive their sins. The same is true for us: we can pray Hosea's prayer and know our sins are forgiven because Christ died for them on the cross. Forgiveness begins when we see the destructiveness of sin and the futility of life without God. Then we must admit we cannot save ourselves; our only hope is in God's mercy. When we request forgiveness, we must recognize that we do not deserve it and therefore cannot demand it. Our appeal must be for God's love and mercy, not for his justice. Although we cannot demand forgiveness, we can be confident that we have received it because God is gracious and loving and wants to restore us to himself, just as he wanted to restore Israel.