

Introduction to Hosea Chapter 11

When Israel Was a Child: The Father's Love, the Son's Rebellion, and the Heart That Cannot Give Up

Hosea chapter 11 is the most theologically profound and the most personally moving chapter in the entire book. The chapters that have preceded it have shown us the marriage metaphor of the covenant — the faithful husband and the unfaithful wife — in its most devastating and its most tender expressions. Chapter 11 introduces the second great metaphor of the book: the Father and the son. The covenant love that chapters 1 through 10 have been revealing through the marriage metaphor is now revealed through the parental metaphor, and the revelation is, if anything, even more intimate and even more anguished.

The chapter opens with one of the most tender statements in the entire Old Testament: When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The calling of Israel out of Egypt — the Exodus, the founding event of the covenant community — is the calling of a son by a father. The God who redeemed Israel from the house of slavery is not the distant deity who intervened in history for abstract theological reasons. He is the father who called his son, who taught him to walk, who took him up in his arms, who led him with cords of kindness and bands of love, who bent down and fed him. The parental imagery is the most intimate available for the description of the divine care: not the king protecting the subject, not the master providing for the servant, but the father tending the child.

The chapter moves through three movements of devastating emotional complexity. The first (verses 1–4) is the description of the father's care: the calling of the son from Egypt, the teaching to walk, the taking up in arms, the healing, the leading with love, the bending down to feed. The second (verses 5–7) is the description of the son's rebellion and its consequences: the return to Egypt, the Assyrian subjugation, the sword that will rage against the cities, the people bent on turning away who cannot be made to return even when called upward. The third (verses 8–11) is the most theologically astonishing passage in the chapter — the divine soliloquy in which the father asks how he can give up the son, how he can hand him over, whose heart has turned against itself in compassion and whose fierce anger will not execute because he is God and not a human being, the Holy One in the midst who will not come in wrath.

The New Testament's use of verse 1 — Out of Egypt I called my son — in Matthew 2:15 is one of the most important hermeneutical keys available for the typological reading of the chapter. Matthew applies the verse to Jesus' return from Egypt after the flight from Herod, identifying Jesus as the true Israel who recapitulates Israel's history in His own person. The calling of the son from Egypt is fulfilled not only in the historical Exodus but in the Son of God who is the Israel that Israel was always meant to be — who goes down to Egypt and comes back, who is the faithful son where Israel was the unfaithful son, who is the one in whom the father's love finds the response it has been seeking through the entire history of the people.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to Hosea chapter 11 as people who have been the son of this chapter — who have been called from our own Egypt, taught to walk, taken up in arms, led with the cords of kindness and the bands of love — and who have responded to the father’s care with the same rebellion that the chapter describes. We have called on the Baals. We have not known that You were the one who healed us. We have been bent on turning away even when You called us upward. We come to this chapter with the awareness that the love described in verses 1 through 4 is the love that has been poured out on us, and the rebellion described in verses 5 through 7 is the rebellion that we have enacted in the place of the gratitude that the love deserved.

Lord, let the divine soliloquy of verses 8 through 11 be received in all its theological depth and all its emotional intensity. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? The question is not rhetorical. It is the genuine anguish of the Father whose heart has turned against itself, whose compassion is stirred, whose fierce anger will not execute because You are God and not a human being. Let the I am God, not a human being be the most important theological declaration in the chapter for us: the love that this chapter reveals is not the love of the human father who can be exhausted by the son’s rebellion. It is the love of the Holy One whose love does not end because it is the love of the One whose nature is not constrained by the limitations of the human emotional capacity.

Let us be the people who tremble back from the west — who come trembling like birds from Assyria and like doves from Egypt, settled in their homes by the declaration of the father whose love has not ended. Let the lion’s roar of verse 10 be the voice that draws us from our wandering and brings us home. We want to be the children who come trembling back. We are tired of the Egypt and the Assyria of the wrong refuges. We want the home that the father’s love is offering.

In Jesus’ name — in the name of the true Son who came out of Egypt and who is the fulfillment of the father’s love that this chapter reveals — Amen.

Hosea 11:1–4

When Israel Was a Child: The Father’s Tender Care and the Son’s Earliest Rebellion

- (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.*
- (3) I taught Ephraim also to go,*

*taking them by their arms;
but they knew not that I healed them.
(4) I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love:
and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws,
and I laid meat unto them.*

The Context

The when Israel was a child of verse 1 is the temporal marker that situates the father's love in the most foundational period of the covenant community's history: the Egypt of the slavery, the Exodus of the calling, the wilderness of the formation. The child Israel is the Israel of the Exodus period — the people who were not yet a nation in the political sense, who were being formed into the covenant community by the father's care. The I loved him is the declaration of the covenant love that preceded and produced the Exodus: the father loved the son before the son had done anything to merit the love, and the calling out of Egypt was the expression of the love that had been present before the calling.

The as they called them, so they went from them of verse 2 is the most heartbreaking pivot in the section. The more the father called, the more the son went away. The calling is the calling of the covenant relationship — the prophetic word, the covenant commandments, the ongoing invitation of the father to the son. And the response is the departure: they went from the calling, they sacrificed to the Baals, they burned incense to the carved idols. The more the love called, the more the rebellion departed. The correlation between the calling and the going is the correlation between the father's increasing investment in the son and the son's increasing distance from the father. The love that calls more fervently produces the rebellion that departs more thoroughly.

The teaching to walk of verse 3 is one of the most domestically intimate images in the entire Old Testament. The father who teaches the child to walk — who holds the child's arms as the child takes the first uncertain steps, who is there for the stumble, who lifts the fallen child and encourages the next attempt — is the image of the divine care in its most physically present and most personally attentive form. The I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms is the description of the Exodus period's wilderness formation: the teaching of the covenant community to walk in the covenant life by the Father who holds the arms and guides the steps. And the but they did not know that I healed them is the most devastating parenthesis: the teaching, the holding, the healing — all of the father's most intimate care — went unrecognized by the son who was the recipient of it.

The cords of kindness and the bands of love of verse 4 are the instruments of the guidance that is not coercive but inviting: the leading of the animal that is led not by force but by the human kindness that removes the yoke and bends down to feed. The I was to them as those who lift the yoke from their jaws — who remove the burden from the ones who have been carrying it — and who bent down and fed them is the image of the father's care in its most physically lowered posture: the God who bends down. The God of the covenant is not the distant deity who governs

from the heights. He is the father who bends down to the level of the child, who removes the burden, who feeds with the intimate attention of the one who is fully present to the need of the one being fed.

Plain American English

When Israel was a child, I loved him dearly, and I called my son out of Egypt. But the more I called to Israel, the more they turned away from me. They kept offering sacrifices to the Baals and burning incense to idols. It was I who taught Israel to walk, supporting him by his arms. But they didn't realize it was me who was healing them. I led them with kindness and love, like someone who lifts a baby to their cheek. I bent down and fed them.

Key Observations

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt”: This signifies **The Fatherly Love That Preceded and Produced the Exodus Is the Love That Chose the Son Before the Son Had Done Anything to Merit the Choosing — the Calling Is the Expression of the Love, Not the Reward for the Worthiness.**

The when Israel was a child, I loved him is the declaration of the priority of the divine love over every human response to it. The love preceded the son's formation, preceded the son's worthiness, preceded everything that the son would do or be. The calling out of Egypt is the expression of the love that was already present before the calling: the father did not call the son out of Egypt because the son had earned the calling. He called because he loved. The election of Israel — the choosing of this particular people for the particular relationship of the covenant — is grounded in the love that preceded it, not in the qualities of the chosen. This is the most fundamental available statement of the theology of grace in the Old Testament: the love that calls the son out of Egypt is the love that is present before and independent of everything the son will do in response to it.

“As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images”: This signifies **The Correlation Between the Father's Calling and the Son's Departure Is the Most Heartbreaking Dynamic in the Chapter — the More the Love Calls, the More the Rebellion Departs.**

The as they called them, so they went from them is the description of the inverse correlation between the divine calling and the human response that is the most theologically difficult feature of the covenant relationship in the book. The more the father calls, the more the son goes away. This is not the description of the son who has not heard the calling. It is the description of the son who has heard and responded with the departure. The departure is responsive to the calling — it is the deliberate turning from the voice that is calling. And the sacrificing to the Baals and the burning of incense to the idols is the specific direction of the departure: the son who goes away from the father's calling goes toward the wrong objects of devotion. The departure has a direction. The direction is the idolatry.

“I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them”: This signifies **The Father's Most Intimate Care — the Teaching to Walk, the**

Holding of the Arms, the Healing — Went Unrecognized by the Son Who Was the Recipient of It.

The they did not know that I healed them is the third expression of the not knowing that has been running through the book: the she did not know that I gave her the grain of chapter 2, the they do not consider that I remember all their evil of chapter 7, and now the they did not know that I healed them of chapter 11. The not knowing is the cognitive failure that underlies every form of the covenant violation: the failure to recognize the father's care in the provision, the teaching, and the healing that the son has been receiving. The son who does not know that the father has been healing him is the son who will credit the healing to someone else — and the someone else who receives the credit for the father's healing is always the Baal. The misattribution of the healing to the wrong source is the same misattribution of chapter 2: the wife who credited the bread and water to the lovers is the son who credits the healing to the Baals.

“I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them”: This signifies **The Cords of Kindness and the Bands of Love Are the Instruments of the Guidance That Is Not Coercive but Inviting — the God Who Bends Down to Feed Is the God Whose Love Is the Most Physically Present and the Most Personally Attentive Available.**

The cords of kindness and bands of love are among the most tender images in the book for the character of the divine guidance. The cords are not the ropes of the enslaved — they are the leading of the one who is being drawn by love rather than compelled by force. And the bending down to feed is the most physically lowered posture available to the description of the divine care: the God who bends down is the God who has descended to the level of the one who needs feeding, who has not waited for the hungry to come up to the level of the feast but who has brought the feast down to the level of the hungry. The yoke removed from the jaws is the release from the burden that the slavery had imposed — the Exodus liberation expressed in the most physical and the most intimate terms: the God who removes the yoke is not a deity who governs through institutional structures but the father who bends down to the child who has been carrying a burden too heavy for a child to carry.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the When Israel Was a Child, I Loved Him as the Declaration of the Love That Preceded Every Human Response to It — and Let the Priority of the Love Be the Foundation of the Covenant Life Rather Than the Reward for Its Performance: The love that called Israel out of Egypt was the love that preceded the son's worthiness, the love that did not wait for the son to become lovable before loving him. The contemporary believer who understands the divine love as the reward for the adequate performance of the covenant life — who experiences the love as the thing that is secured by the right behavior rather than the thing that precedes and produces the right behavior — has the order reversed. The love comes first. The calling comes from the love. The covenant life is the response to the love that has already been given, not the condition for the love that is being withheld until the performance merits it. Let the priority of the love be the foundation: the father loved first, the son is called because the father loves, and the covenant life is the grateful response to the love that was present before the son did anything.

2. Identify the Unrecognized Healings — the Ways in Which the Father’s Care Has Been Present in the Teaching, the Holding, and the Healing That Have Not Been Recognized as the Father’s Work:

The they did not know that I healed them is the diagnostic of the son who has been receiving the father’s care without recognizing it. The contemporary believer who looks back over the history of the life — the teachings that formed the character, the arms that held in the moments of the stumble, the healings that came through the circumstances that at the time felt like abandonment — and does not recognize the father’s hand in them is in the condition of verse 3. The recognition of the unrecognized healings is the formation of the gratitude that the recognition produces: the da’at Elohim that knows the father has been present in every moment of the formation, the teaching, and the healing. Identify the healings. The recognition produces the gratitude. The gratitude produces the covenant faithfulness.

3. Receive the Cords of Kindness and the Bands of Love as the Character of the Divine Guidance That Is Not Coercive but Inviting — and Respond to the Leading That Draws Rather Than the Compulsion That Forces:

The guidance by the cords of kindness and the bands of love is the description of the divine leadership that draws the covenant community toward the covenant life through love rather than through coercion. The contemporary believer who has experienced the divine guidance primarily as the set of rules that restrict the wrong behavior rather than as the leading of the love that draws toward the right life has not yet understood the cords of kindness and the bands of love. The guidance of the father is the leading of the love — the drawing toward the covenant life by the kindness and the love of the One who bends down to feed and removes the yoke from the jaws. Respond to the drawing. The covenant life is not the compliance with the coercion. It is the response to the love that leads.

How This Relates to Today

The when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son of verse 1 is the verse that Matthew 2:15 applies to Jesus’ return from Egypt after the flight from Herod: Out of Egypt I called my son. The hermeneutical move that Matthew makes is the identification of Jesus as the true Son who recapitulates Israel’s history in His own person. The Israel that was called out of Egypt as a child is the son who failed to respond faithfully to the father’s love. Jesus is the Son who responds faithfully — who goes down to Egypt and comes back, who is the obedient Son where Israel was the disobedient son, who is the fulfillment of what Israel was always called to be. The typological reading of verse 1 is the canonical reading that gives the verse its full theological force: the father’s calling of the son out of Egypt finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Son who is Himself the Israel that Israel was always meant to be.

The I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms is also one of the most important images in the chapter for the formation of the contemporary believer’s understanding of spiritual formation. The father who teaches the child to walk is not the father who waits for the child to develop the capacity for walking on their own. He is the father who holds the arms, who guides the steps, who is present for the stumble and the recovery. The formation of the covenant life is the formation of the child who is being taught to walk by the father who holds the arms — the formation that requires the sustained presence of the father and the sustained responsiveness of the child to the guidance of the arms that are holding. The child who cannot be taught to walk is the child who cannot receive the holding of the arms. Let the arms hold.

Key Lesson: **The first section of the chapter establishes the father's love in its most tender and most comprehensive expression: the love that preceded the son's worthiness and called him out of Egypt, the teaching to walk and the taking up in arms, the healing that was not recognized, and the leading with the cords of kindness and the bands of love by the God who bent down to feed — and the devastating counterpoint: the more the father called, the more the son went toward the Baals, the more intimate the care the more unrecognized the healer, so that the entire account of the father's love is simultaneously the account of the son's response that the love deserved but did not receive.**

Hosea 11:5–7

The Return to Egypt and the Sword in the Cities: The Consequence of the Persistent Turning Away

*(5) He shall not return into the land of Egypt,
but the Assyrian shall be his king,
because they refused to return.*

*(6) And the sword shall abide on his cities,
and shall consume his branches,
and devour them, because of their own counsels.*

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

The Context

The he shall not return to the land of Egypt of verse 5 is the first statement of the consequence and requires careful reading. The apparent contradiction with chapter 8:13 — which declared that Israel shall return to Egypt — is resolved by the recognition that verse 5 is saying that Egypt will not serve as the refuge that Israel hopes it will be. The typological Egypt of the Assyrian captivity will be the form that the return to the house of slavery takes: the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to return to the LORD their God. The refusal to return — the refused to return of verse 5 — is the explanation that connects the entire indictment of the preceding chapters to the consequence that is now being declared. The Assyrian dominion is the consequence of the refusal to return to the LORD.

The sword that rages against the cities of verse 6 is the military consequence in its most specific and most destructive form. The sword shall rage against their cities and devour their oracle-priests and consume them because of their own counsels. The because of their own counsels is the identification of the source of the destruction in the self-determination that has been the northern kingdom's characteristic sin since the days of Jeroboam I: the counsel of the kings who set up the golden calves, the counsel of the princes who made the foreign alliances, the counsel

of the priests who rejected the knowledge and fed on the sin of the people. The destruction is the harvest of the counsel that has been sown since the founding of the northern kingdom.

The my people are bent on turning away from me of verse 7 is the most despairing statement in the section. The bending — the structural orientation of the will toward the departure from the covenant God — is the consequence of the sustained turning away that has become the habitual posture of the community. The community is not merely choosing to turn away in individual acts of the will. It has been formed by the accumulated choices of the turning away into a community whose very orientation — whose structural lean, the direction in which it bends under pressure — is away from the covenant God. And though they call them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him: the prophetic calling of the people upward to the covenant God produces no upward movement. The bent-away posture does not yield to the upward calling.

Plain American English

They won't go back to Egypt, but Assyria will rule over them because they have refused to return to me. A sword will flash through their cities and destroy the bars of their city gates, putting an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn away from me. Even when the prophets call them upward to the Most High, not one of them exalts him at all.

Key Observations

“Because they refused to return”: This signifies **The Refused to Return Is the Summary of the Entire Indictment of the Preceding Chapters — the One Sentence That Explains the Consequence That the Entire Chapter Has Been Building Toward.**

The because they refused to return is the most compressed available summary of the theological argument of chapters 4 through 10. Every specific form of the covenant violation that the preceding chapters have catalogued — the rejection of knowledge, the misattribution of the provision, the Baal worship, the golden calves, the foreign alliances, the self-appointed kings, the wrong sowing, the compounding of the Gibeah sin — is the specific expression of the general posture that verse 5 names: the refusal to return. The return that chapter 5 identified as the condition of the genuine seeking, the return that chapter 6 described in the beautiful but shallow language of Come, let us return to the LORD, the return that chapter 7 showed to be the deceitful bow that does not reach the Most High — this return has been refused. The refusal of the return is the reason for the Assyrian dominion.

“My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him”: This signifies **The Structural Orientation of the Will Toward the Departure Is the Most Comprehensive Description of the Community Whose Accumulated Choices Have Formed It into the Habitually Turning-Away Posture.**

The bent to backsliding from me is the description of the community that has been formed by the accumulated choices of the turning away into a community whose very orientation — whose structural lean, the direction in which it bends under pressure, the posture of the will under the conditions of the ordinary life — is away from the covenant God. The bending is the

consequence of the habits of the departure that have been practiced long enough to become the structural orientation of the community. And the though they call them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him is the evidence of the depth of the structural bending: the upward calling of the prophets produces no upward movement in the community that has been structurally bent downward. The community that has practiced the departure long enough has been formed into a community that cannot respond to the upward calling with the upward movement. The bending is the consequence of the practice. The practice has become the structure.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Receive the Refused to Return as the Most Honest Available Assessment of the Community's Relationship to the Covenant God — and Examine Whether the Return Has Been Refused in the Specific Ways That the Preceding Chapters Have Named: The because they refused to return is the theological summary that the contemporary community of faith needs to apply to itself with the diagnostic honesty that the verse requires. The return that has been refused is not the dramatic explicit rejection of the covenant God. It is the accumulated small refusals of the specific returns that the specific chapters have been calling for: the return from the misattribution of the provision, the return from the divided heart, the return from the wrong sowing, the return to the seeking of the LORD. The accumulation of the small refusals produces the structural orientation of the bent-away community. Examine the specific refusals. The summary cannot be addressed until the specific refusals that constitute it have been identified and named.

2. Recognize the Bent-Away Posture as the Most Serious Form of the Spiritual Condition Because It Has Moved from the Level of the Individual Choice to the Level of the Structural Orientation: The bent to backsliding from me is the description of the condition that has moved beyond the individual choice to the structural orientation. The community that is bent away from the covenant God is not the community that is making individual choices against the covenant life. It is the community that has been formed by the accumulated choices into a community whose orientation is structurally away — whose habitual posture, whose default direction, whose response to pressure is away from the covenant God rather than toward Him. This is the most serious form of the spiritual condition because it requires not merely the correction of individual choices but the reformation of the structural orientation: the breaking up of the fallow ground of chapter 10 applied not to the individual act but to the habitual direction of the community's life.

How This Relates to Today

The bent to backsliding from me is one of the most diagnostically accurate descriptions available for the condition of the contemporary Western church in its relationship to the covenant God. The structural orientation of the church — the direction in which it bends under the pressure of the surrounding culture, the default direction of its institutional choices, the habitual posture of its theological and pastoral life — has been formed by decades of the accumulated small choices of accommodation, assimilation, and the misattribution of the provision. The church is not explicitly rejecting the covenant God. It is structurally bent away from Him. And the though they call them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him is the description of the upward

prophetic calling that produces no upward movement in the bent-away community. The prophetic word is being spoken. The structural orientation of the community is away from it.

Key Lesson: **The second section of the chapter traces the consequence of the persistent turning away to its most comprehensive expression: the refused to return that explains the Assyrian dominion, the sword in the cities that is the harvest of the community's own counsel, and the bent-away posture of the community that has been formed by the accumulated choices of the turning away into the structural orientation that the upward prophetic calling cannot redirect — the community that is bent to backsliding from the covenant God and produces no upward movement in response to the calling that would lift it.**

Hosea 11:8–11

How Can I Give You Up? The Divine Soliloquy, the Heart That Turns, and the Lion's Roar That Brings the Children Home

*(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:
and when he shall roar,
then the children shall tremble from the west.
(11) They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt,
and as a dove out of the land of Assyria:
and I will place them in their houses,
saith the LORD.*

The Context

The how shall I give you up, O Ephraim? of verse 8 is one of the most theologically astonishing questions in the entire Old Testament. The question is addressed to the community that has just been described in verses 5 through 7 as bent on turning away, as refusing to return, as producing no upward movement in response to the upward calling. Everything in the preceding chapters —

the rejected knowledge, the Baal worship, the golden calves, the foreign alliances, the wrong sowing, the compounding of the Gibeah sin, the wandering among the nations, the refusal to return — has been building toward the moment when the covenant curses are fully executed and the community is destroyed as thoroughly as Admah and Zeboim were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah. And in that moment, the father asks: how shall I give you up?

The Admah and Zeboim of verse 8 are the cities that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 14 and 19 — the most comprehensive available image of the divine judgment. The how shall I make you like Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? is the question of the father who is standing at the threshold of the most comprehensive judgment and finding that the love does not permit the execution. The mine heart is turned within me — the Hebrew is the language of the most profound inner agitation, the turning of the heart against itself — and my compassion grows warm and tender is the description of the divine emotional experience at the threshold of the judgment: the compassion that is kindled against the intention to execute the judgment, the love that turns the heart against the execution of the wrath.

The I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim of verse 9 is the declaration that the compassion has prevailed over the judgment. And the reason is the most theologically important statement in the chapter: for I am God and not a human being, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. The I am God and not a human being is the foundation of the divine decision: the love that will not execute the judgment is the love of the One whose nature is not constrained by the limitations of the human emotional capacity. The human father who has been betrayed as thoroughly as the covenant God has been betrayed by Israel might be expected to eventually give up the child who refuses to return. The divine father does not give up, because He is God and not a human being. The holiness of God — the Holy One in your midst — is here the attribute that prevents the judgment rather than the attribute that demands it. The holiness of the love is the holiness that will not permit the abandonment of the beloved.

The lion's roar of verse 10 is the image that brings the chapter to its eschatological resolution. The children who have been wandering will walk after the LORD when He roars like a lion — the roar that is the call of the father to the scattered children, the gathering cry that draws the dispersed community back from the west and from Egypt and from Assyria. The trembling as a bird out of Egypt and as a dove out of Assyria is the frightened but responsive return of the community that has been in the wrong refuges and hears the lion's roar from the right home. The I will settle them in their homes, declares the LORD is the settling of the scattered into the homes from which the refusal to return had driven them. The wandering is over. The lion has roared. The children are coming home.

Plain American English

“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 Zeboim? My heart is torn within me — all my compassion is stirred up! No, I will not let my fierce anger do it. I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am

God, not a human being. I am the Holy One among you, and I will not come to you in anger. When I roar like a lion, my people will follow me. They will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds out of Egypt, like doves from Assyria. And I will settle them back in their homes,” declares the LORD.

Key Observations

“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together”: This signifies **The Divine Soliloquy Is the Most Theologically Profound Passage in the Chapter — the Question That the Father Cannot Answer Against the Beloved Child Reveals the Love That Cannot Permit the Execution of the Judgment the Rebellion Has Fully Deserved.**

The how shall I give you up is the question that has no answer from the human perspective. The community that has been catalogued in chapters 4 through 10 has done everything that would logically lead to the answer: give them up. The rejection of knowledge, the Baal worship, the golden calves, the foreign alliances, the wrong sowing, the bent-away posture, the refusal to return — all of it builds toward the give-up. And the father stands at the threshold of the give-up and asks the question that the love prevents him from answering in the direction that the logic demands. The heart that is turned within me is the heart that has turned against the logic of the give-up — the emotional experience of the love that cannot complete the execution of the judgment that the rebellion has earned. The compassion grows warm and tender at the very moment when the fierce anger has the most justification. This is the most transparent window into the inner life of God available in the Old Testament.

“For I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city”: This signifies **The I Am God and Not a Human Being Is the Theological Foundation of the Decision Not to Execute the Judgment — the Love That Will Not Give Up Is the Love of the One Whose Nature Is Not Constrained by the Limitations of the Human Emotional Capacity.**

The I am God and not a human being is the most important theological statement in the chapter. It is the identification of the nature of the divine love as the foundation of the decision not to execute the judgment. The human father whose child has behaved as Israel has behaved toward the covenant God would eventually, by the logic of the human emotional economy, reach the give-up. The human love has a capacity. The human patience has a limit. The human compassion can be exhausted by the sustained provocation of the sustained rebellion. But the divine love does not operate within the constraints of the human emotional capacity. The I am God is the declaration that the love that prevents the give-up is the love of the One whose nature is not bounded by the limits that bound human love. The holiness of the Holy One in your midst is here the holiness of the love that does not end — the holy love that is holier than human love precisely because it is not constrained by the limitations that make human love give up.

“He shall roar like a lion: and when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west”: This signifies **The Lion’s Roar Is the Eschatological Gathering Cry of the Father Who Calls the Scattered Children from the Wrong Refuges Back to the Home That the Refusal to Return Had Driven Them From.**

The lion's roar of verse 10 is the most unexpected image in the closing section because the lion has previously appeared in chapter 5 as the image of the divine judgment — I will be to Ephraim like a lion. The lion who tore and went away in chapter 5 is the same lion who roars in chapter 11, but the roar is now the gathering cry rather than the tearing departure. The image has been transformed by the divine soliloquy of verses 8–9: the lion who will not give up is the lion who roars to gather rather than to destroy. And the children who tremble from the west — who come trembling like birds from Egypt and like doves from Assyria — are the scattered community that has been in the wrong refuges and hears the lion's roar from the right home. The trembling is the appropriate response to the lion who roars: the reverential awe of the community that has come home to the One whose love was too great to permit the give-up.

“They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD”: This signifies **The Settling in Their Homes Is the Eschatological Resolution of the Wandering That Chapter 9 Declared as the Consequence of the Not Listening — the Father Settles the Scattered Children into the Homes That the Refusal to Return Had Driven Them From.**

The I will settle them in their homes, declares the LORD is the most complete reversal of the chapter's preceding consequence available. The wanderers among the nations of chapter 9 — the scattered community that has been in Egypt and Assyria — are settled in their homes by the father whose love did not permit the give-up. The trembling return of the birds and doves from the wrong refuges is the response to the lion's roar — the frightened but responsive return of the community that has heard the gathering cry of the father. And the settling in the homes is the restoration of the rest that the wandering had replaced: the father brings the scattered children home, settles them in the places that the refusal to return had driven them from, and declares it with the authority of the LORD whose love did not permit the abandonment. The eschatological resolution of the chapter is the settling of the wanderers. The lion has roared. The children are home.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Let the How Can I Give You Up Be the Theological Foundation of the Confidence That the Divine Love Has Not Been Exhausted by the History of the Rebellion: The how shall I give you up, O Ephraim? is the question that the father cannot answer against the beloved child, and it is the question whose unanswerable character is the most profound available assurance for the believer who fears that the history of the rebellion has finally exhausted the patience of the covenant God. The love that asks how can I give you up is the love that cannot give up — not because the rebellion has not been serious, but because the nature of the love is not constrained by the seriousness of the rebellion. The I am God and not a human being is the theological foundation of this assurance: the love that will not give up is not the human love that can be exhausted but the divine love whose nature prevents the exhaustion. Let the how can I give you up be the foundation of the confidence, not the sentimental reassurance that the rebellion does not matter, but the theologically grounded assurance that the nature of the divine love is the nature that does not permit the abandonment.

2. Receive the I Am God and Not a Human Being as the Most Theologically Important Distinction in the Chapter — the Character of the Divine Love Is Different from the

Character of Human Love in the Specific Way That Matters Most for the Wanderer: The I am God and not a human being is addressed specifically to the community that has done everything that would exhaust a human father's patience. The distinction is not the abstract theological statement about the divine attributes. It is the pastoral declaration that the love being described in the soliloquy of verses 8–9 is not the love that human experience has taught the wanderer to expect from the fathers and mothers and communities whose love has been exhausted by the sustained provocation. The divine love is different from the human love in the specific way that matters most for the wanderer: it does not give up. The how can I give you up is the question that the divine love cannot answer against the beloved, because the nature of the divine love does not permit the give-up. Let this distinction be received as the pastoral declaration it is.

3. Tremble Back from the West — Let the Lion's Roar Be the Voice That Draws You from the Wrong Refuges and Settles You in the Home That the Father's Love Has Been Preparing: The children who tremble back from the west, who come like birds from Egypt and doves from Assyria, who are settled in their homes by the declaration of the father — these are the community that has heard the lion's roar and responded with the trembling return. The contemporary believer who is in the Egypt and Assyria of the wrong refuges — who has been seeking the security, the significance, the healing, and the belonging in the wrong places — is being called back by the lion's roar of the father whose love did not permit the give-up. Tremble back. The trembling is the appropriate response to the roar: the reverential awe of the one who has recognized the voice of the father and is coming home. The settling in the homes is waiting on the other side of the trembling return.

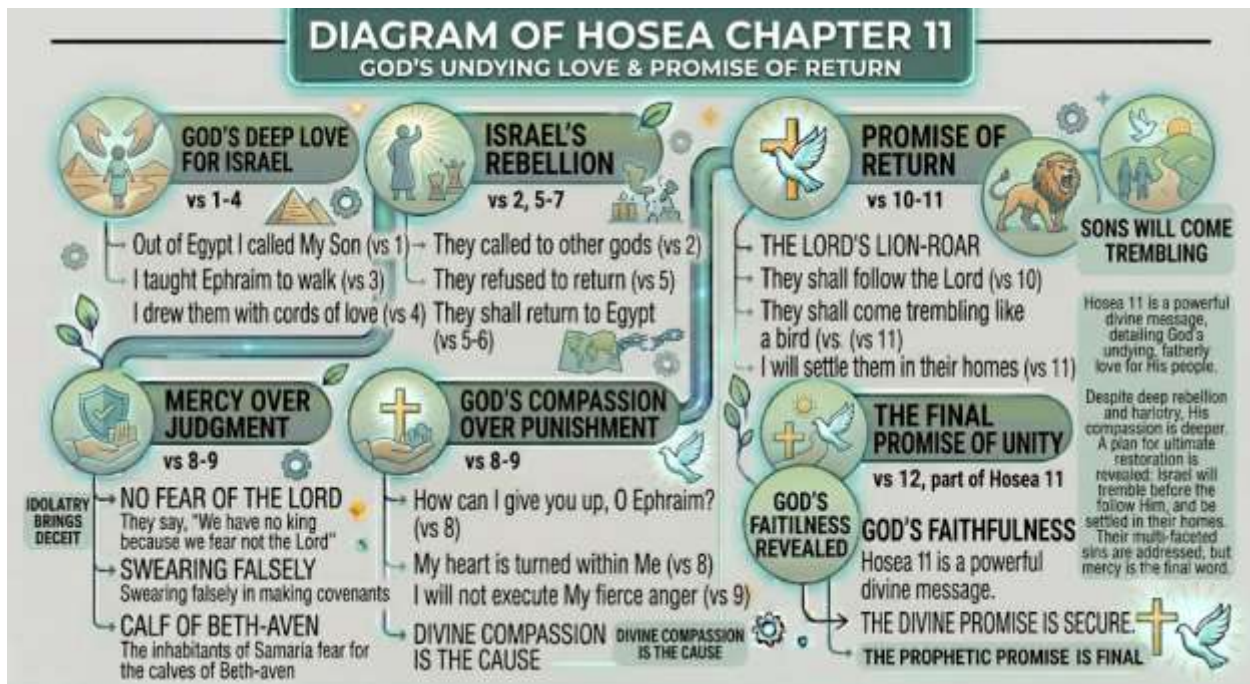
How This Relates to Today

The how shall I give you up, O Ephraim? is the most theologically significant question in the chapter and one of the most significant in the entire Old Testament for its revelation of the inner life of God. The question has no answer in the direction that the logic of the rebellion demands. The love does not permit the give-up. And the I am God and not a human being is the theological reason that makes the love that does not give up coherent: the divine love is not constrained by the limitations of the human love. This is the Old Testament's most direct available statement of the theology of grace as the love that persists beyond the point where human love would be exhausted. The New Testament's most famous statement of this love — God so loved the world that he gave his only Son — is the answer to the how can I give you up that Hosea 11:8 asks: the giving of the Son is the divine answer to the question that the divine love prevented from being answered in the direction of the give-up.

The lion's roar of verse 10 is also one of the most important images in the chapter for the formation of the eschatological imagination. The lion who roars to gather is the image of the returning Christ who will gather the scattered community of the new covenant from every nation and settle them in the homes that the father's love has been preparing. The trembling return of the birds from Egypt and the doves from Assyria is the image of every generation of the wanderers who hear the lion's roar and come home. The I will settle them in their homes is the eschatological promise of the rest that replaces the wandering — the settling of the scattered into the covenant home that the father's love has never stopped preparing. The roar is coming. The

children are being gathered. The settling is the promise of the One whose love did not permit the give-up.

Key Lesson: **The divine soliloquy of verses 8–11 is the theological summit of the entire book: the how can I give you up that the love prevents from being answered in the direction of the give-up, the my heart turns within me that is the most transparent window into the inner life of God available in the Old Testament, the I am God and not a human being that is the theological foundation of the love that does not end, and the lion's roar that gathers the scattered children from Egypt and Assyria and settles them in their homes — the eschatological resolution of the entire book's movement from the indictment of the unfaithfulness to the promise of the restoration that the father's love that cannot give up has always been working toward.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close Hosea chapter 11 having been undone by the most theologically profound and the most personally moving chapter in the book. We have heard the when Israel was a child, I loved him — the love that preceded the son's worthiness, the calling from Egypt that was the expression of the love already present. We have been confronted by the as they called them, so they went from them — the inverse correlation between the father's calling and the son's departure. We have been convicted by the they did not know that I healed them — the unrecognized care of the father in every moment of the teaching and the holding and the healing. And we have been undone by the how can I give you up, O Ephraim? — the question that the father cannot answer against the beloved child.

Lord, let the I am God and not a human being be the most important declaration in the chapter for us. We know what it is to have the human love exhaust itself against the sustained provocation. We know the human love that gives up when the rebellion reaches the level at which the giving up becomes the logical response. But You are God and not a human being, and the love that this chapter reveals is not the love of the human father who can be exhausted. It is the love of the Holy One whose nature does not permit the abandonment, whose compassion grows warm and tender at the threshold of the judgment, whose heart turns within itself against the execution of the wrath that the rebellion has fully deserved.

We are the children from the west, from Egypt, from Assyria. We have been in the wrong refuges. We have been the bent-away community that produces no upward movement in response to the upward calling. We have been the son who did not recognize the father's healing. We have refused to return. And yet — the how can I give you up has not been answered against us. The lion has not yet completed the tearing and the going away. The roar of the gathering is still being sounded. And the I will settle them in their homes is still the promise that the father's love has not permitted to become void.

We come trembling back. Like birds from Egypt. Like doves from Assyria. Trembling with the reverential awe of the ones who have heard the lion's roar and recognized the voice of the father whose love did not permit the give-up. Settle us in our homes. We are done wandering. The father's love has roared. We are coming home.

In Jesus' name — in the name of the true Son who came out of Egypt and fulfilled the when Israel was a child, I loved him, who is the faithful Son where Israel was the unfaithful son, who is the answer to the how can I give you up in the giving of the Son that is the ultimate expression of the love that the divine soliloquy of this chapter reveals — Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone