

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Sowing the Wind, Reaping the Whirlwind

Hosea 9:1–11:11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this unit holds together two truths that a shallow faith tends to pull apart: God's certain judgment and God's unbreakable love. Israel has sown idolatry, false security, and divided loyalty, and God will not pretend the harvest can be anything but a whirlwind. The moral order of God's world is real; 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Galatians 6:7) is not a slogan but a description of reality. At the same time, the climax of the unit (Hosea 11:1–9) reveals a Father whose compassion is 'kindled together,' who will not execute the fierceness of His anger as a mere tyrant would. The teacher must guard against two errors: a sentimental God who never judges, and a cold God who only judges. Hosea gives us the living God who does both because He is holy and He is love. The reference to Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 must be handled with care: Matthew is not misquoting but reading the whole story of Israel as reaching its true destination in Jesus, the faithful Son who is everything the nation was called to be and failed to become. We are saved not by our own perfect sowing but by being united to Him.

The spiritual formation aim is honesty and homecoming. We want students to walk out of this lesson refusing the false joy of denial and instead looking soberly at what they have actually been planting. The sowing-and-reaping principle is meant to drive us to repentance now, while there is still time to 'break up the fallow ground' and 'sow in righteousness.' But we do not want students to leave crushed. The same God who warns of the whirlwind cries, 'How can I give thee up?' The aim is a class that takes sin seriously enough to change and trusts grace deeply enough to come home. We want hearts that hear both the warning and the welcome, and that respond by returning to the Father through His faithful Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Hosea 9:1–3, why does God tell Israel not to rejoice 'as other people,' and what does this reveal about the difference between true joy rooted in covenant faithfulness and the false joy of a prosperous but unfaithful people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 9 opens by interrupting a party. Israel is celebrating the harvest, very likely at a festival on the threshing floor, and Hosea cuts across the music with a stark command: 'Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people' (9:1). The phrase 'as other people' is the key. Israel was meant to be different, a people whose joy flowed from covenant with the living God. Instead they have

adopted the religion of the nations around them, crediting their grain and wine to Baal, the supposed god of fertility. Their joy has the right outward shape but the wrong source.

Hosea calls this idolatry 'a reward upon every cornfloor' (9:1), language that frames Israel's worship of Baal as spiritual prostitution. They believed Baal gave the harvest; in truth they were paying him for a gift that came from the Lord. This is the deep deception of idolatry: it takes God's good gifts and uses them to honor a counterfeit.

Verses 2-3 announce the reaping. The threshing floor and winepress that once symbolized abundance will fail them, and they will not remain in 'the LORD'S land' but go into exile, even back toward 'Egypt' and on to Assyria. To eat 'unclean things in Assyria' (9:3) is to be cut off from the worship and table fellowship of God's people. The harvest of unfaithfulness is dislocation from the very presence of God they took for granted.

The teaching point is sharp and pastoral. There is a counterfeit joy that is really denial in disguise. A nation, or a soul, can feel blessed and secure while quietly drifting from the One who is the source of every true blessing. Hosea's refusal to let the party continue is itself an act of love.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True joy is rooted in covenant faithfulness, not merely in prosperity or pleasant feelings.
- Idolatry takes God's gifts and credits them to a counterfeit, robbing God of glory.
- The 'unclean things in Assyria' picture exile as separation from fellowship with God and His people.
- Outward religious joy can mask inward unfaithfulness; the shape of worship is not the same as the source of worship.

Discussion Prompts

- What 'other people' do we sometimes want to be like, and where does that pull our joy away from God?
- How can prosperity actually dull our awareness of spiritual danger?
- What does it mean for a Christian today to keep the source of joy, and not just the feeling of joy, anchored in God?

Question 2

Student Question:

Hosea exposes a celebration built on denial. Where am I tempted to celebrate or feel secure while ignoring something God has been trying to show me about my heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Hosea 9:7–9 the prophet himself becomes a target. ‘The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad,’ the people scoff (9:7). When a society has decided to silence the truth, the messenger who tells it is dismissed as a lunatic or a crank. Hosea describes himself as a watchman set over the people, but one who finds ‘a snare of a fowler in all his ways’ (9:8), traps laid by those who hate his message.

Verse 9 reaches back to one of the darkest moments in Israel’s history: ‘They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah’ (compare Judges 19–21). Hosea is saying the rot is not new and not shallow. It runs to the foundations.

The pattern here is timeless and sobering. A people far gone in sin do not merely ignore correction; they attack it. The prophet’s sanity is questioned precisely because he still sees clearly when everyone else has agreed not to. Stephen would later remind Israel that this was their long habit toward God’s messengers (Acts 7:51–52).

For us, the lesson cuts two ways. We must ask whether we have grown so comfortable with a sin that we now resent anyone who names it. And we must brace ourselves to be the watchman, knowing faithfulness to the truth is rarely popular.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A hardened people attack the messenger rather than receive the message.
- Hosea’s role as ‘watchman’ carries real cost; faithfulness invites hostility.
- ‘The days of Gibeah’ show sin’s roots run deep into a nation’s history.
- Calling truth ‘madness’ is an old strategy for silencing conviction.

Discussion Prompts

- When have we been tempted to dismiss a hard truth by attacking the one who spoke it?
- What does it cost to be a faithful ‘watchman’ in our families, churches, or workplaces?
- How do we receive correction without resentment?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Hosea 9:10 God recalls finding Israel ‘like grapes in the wilderness,’ then mourns that they ‘went to Baalpeor’ and ‘separated themselves unto that shame.’ What does this picture of an early delight turned to betrayal teach us about how sin corrupts something God once cherished?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 9:10 is one of the tenderest verses in the book: ‘I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time.’ God recalls the sheer delight of discovering Israel, like stumbling on ripe fruit in a barren place. This is how God speaks of His early love for His people, with surprise and gladness.

But the verse turns sharply: 'they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame.' The reference is to the sin at Peor (Numbers 25), where Israel joined themselves to Baal and to immorality. The very people God delighted in 'became abominable according as they loved' (9:10). We become like what we worship.

This is the tragedy of idolatry set in personal terms. It is not the breaking of an abstract rule; it is the betrayal of a love. God found them as something precious and they ran to something shameful. Sin, at its root, is not first lawbreaking but love misplaced.

The teaching aim here is to recover wonder and grief together. We should marvel that God ever delighted in us, and grieve honestly at how we have spent that delight cheaply. The path back always begins with remembering whose we were.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God speaks of His early love for His people with genuine delight, like finding ripe fruit in a desert.
- 'Baalpeor' (Numbers 25) recalls Israel joining themselves to a false god and to immorality.
- We become like what we worship; loving shameful things makes us shameful.
- Sin is fundamentally misplaced love, not merely abstract rule-breaking.

Discussion Prompts

- Does it surprise you that God describes His love for His people with such delight? Why or why not?
- What does it mean that 'we become like what we worship'?
- How does remembering God's early delight in us help us repent?

Question 4

Student Question:

God remembers Israel's beginnings with tenderness even while naming their unfaithfulness. When I look back on my early walk with the Lord, what 'first love' has cooled, and what would returning to it require of me now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 10 opens with another agricultural image: 'Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself' (10:1). The Hebrew can carry the sense of a luxuriant, spreading vine, but a vine whose fruit serves only itself. Prosperity has not produced gratitude; it has produced self-investment. The more Israel had, the more altars and 'images' they built (10:1), not to honor God but to secure their own success.

Verse 2 names the diagnosis: 'their heart is divided.' This is the spiritual heart of the chapter. A divided heart tries to keep God and keep its idols, to worship at the temple and hedge its bets at

the high places. James would later call such a person 'double minded' and 'unstable in all his ways' (James 1:8).

Prosperity is revealing here, not redemptive. When the harvest was good, Israel poured the surplus into more idolatry. Abundance did not heal the divided heart; it financed it. This is a piercing word for comfortable people in every age.

The teacher should press the point that a divided heart is not a small flaw to be managed but a fracture that must be healed. Jesus said we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). The call is not to balance God and idols but to let God have the whole heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A 'fruitful' life that bears fruit only 'unto himself' is spiritually empty.
- Prosperity exposes the heart's true loyalties rather than purifying them.
- A 'divided heart' tries to keep both God and idols and ends unstable in everything.
- Jesus' teaching that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) answers Hosea's diagnosis.

Discussion Prompts

- How can material success actually deepen, rather than cure, a divided heart?
- Where do we try to 'hedge our bets' between God and something else?
- What would it look like to give God the whole heart rather than a balanced portion?

Question 5

Student Question:

Hosea 10:1–2 says Israel was 'an empty vine' that brought forth fruit only 'unto himself,' and that 'their heart is divided.' What is the danger of a divided heart, and why does prosperity so often expose rather than cure it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 10:3–8 traces the political collapse that follows spiritual collapse. The people will say, 'We have no king' (10:3), and the calf-idol of Bethel, here called the calf of 'Bethaven' (house of vanity), will be carried off to Assyria as tribute (10:5–6). The very thing they trusted to save them becomes plunder. Idols cannot rescue; they get rescued, or rather captured.

Verse 4 indicts their public life: 'they have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant.' Their treaties, their politics, their oaths are all poisoned, springing up 'as hemlock in the furrows of the field.' When the heart is corrupt, even the institutions of justice grow toxic.

The famous turn comes in 10:12–13. God pleads: 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain

righteousness upon you.' Then the indictment: 'Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies.' Here is the great principle of the whole study. The field of the human life will yield whatever is planted in it.

'Fallow ground' is hard, unplowed, neglected soil. To break it up is to do the painful, deliberate work of repentance, exposing the hardened places to God so that righteousness can be sown there. And note the grace woven in: when we seek the Lord, He comes to 'rain righteousness' upon us. We break up the ground; He sends the rain.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Idols cannot save; they are themselves carried off as plunder (10:5–6).
- Corrupt hearts poison even public institutions and oaths (10:4).
- The sowing-and-reaping principle (10:12–13) governs the moral order of God's world.
- 'Break up your fallow ground' pictures the deliberate, painful work of repentance.
- Our repentance is met by God's grace: He comes to 'rain righteousness' upon those who seek Him.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean practically to 'break up the fallow ground' in your own life?
- Where have you 'eaten the fruit' of something you earlier planted, for good or ill?
- How does the promise that God will 'rain righteousness' keep repentance from being mere self-effort?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where does my own heart feel 'divided' between devotion to God and devotion to something I am unwilling to release, and how is that division showing up in my daily choices?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 10:13 carries a phrase worth dwelling on: 'because thou didst trust in thy way, and in the multitude of thy mighty men.' Israel's deepest sin was not merely Baal worship at the altar; it was a settled trust in their own strength, strategy, and resources. They trusted 'thy way' instead of God's way.

This is the quiet idolatry of the capable and the self-reliant. A person may keep clear of obvious sins while building an entire life on confidence in their own competence, savings, network, or plans. The harvest of that trust, Hosea warns, is 'tumult' among the people and the destruction of fortresses (10:14).

Scripture consistently warns against trusting in chariots, horses, armies, and wealth (Psalm 20:7, Psalm 33:16–17). The issue is never that planning or work is wrong, but that the heart settles its security in created things rather than in the Creator.

For the class, this is a searching question: what is your ‘multitude of mighty men’? What is the thing you quietly count on so that, if it failed, you would feel truly unsafe? Hosea would point us to plant our trust in the Lord before the whirlwind reveals what we were really leaning on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting ‘thy way’ and ‘mighty men’ is the idolatry of self-reliance.
- Capable, self-sufficient people are especially prone to this hidden idolatry.
- Scripture repeatedly warns against trusting chariots, armies, and wealth (Psalm 20:7).
- The whirlwind exposes what our security was actually resting upon.

Discussion Prompts

- What is your personal ‘multitude of mighty men,’ the thing you quietly count on for security?
- How is wise planning different from misplaced trust?
- What would change if your deepest sense of safety rested in God alone?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Hosea 10:12–13 God pleads, ‘Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy,’ but charges, ‘Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity.’ What does this contrast teach about the spiritual law of sowing and reaping, and how does it call us to ‘break up your fallow ground’ and ‘seek the LORD’?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 11 opens the most tender window in the entire book: ‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt’ (11:1). God speaks not as a distant ruler but as a Father remembering His child. The exodus, the founding act of the nation, is recast as the moment God took His son out of slavery to raise him as His own.

Matthew quotes this verse and applies it to the child Jesus, brought back from Egypt after Herod’s threat: ‘that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son’ (Matthew 2:15). At first this seems puzzling, since Hosea is clearly speaking of historical Israel. But Matthew is doing something profound. He reads the whole story of Israel as reaching its true and faithful fulfillment in Jesus.

Israel was God’s ‘son’ who was called out of Egypt and then failed, turning to idols in the wilderness and beyond. Jesus is the true and faithful Son who is also called out of Egypt, who

goes into the wilderness, and who does not fail. Where the nation broke covenant, He kept it perfectly. Matthew is showing us that everything Israel was meant to be is finally embodied in Christ.

This matters enormously for our salvation. We are not saved by being righteous Israelites or by our own perfect record. We are saved by being joined to the faithful Son, the Lord Jesus, whose obedience covers our failure. The whole story bends toward Him, and we find our place in it only in Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hosea 11:1 portrays God as a Father who loved and called His child out of Egypt.
- Matthew 2:15 reads this as fulfilled in Jesus, the true Son brought out of Egypt.
- Jesus is the faithful Son who succeeds where the nation Israel failed.
- Matthew reads Israel's whole story as completed in Christ, not as a misquotation.
- We are saved by union with the faithful Son, not by our own perfect record.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might Matthew see Israel's story as fulfilled in Jesus rather than misapplied?
- How does Jesus succeeding where Israel failed give us confidence before God?
- What does it mean for you personally to be 'in' the faithful Son?

Question 8

Student Question:

What is one piece of 'fallow ground,' some hard, neglected, unplowed area of my life, that the Lord is asking me to break up so that righteousness can be sown there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 11:3–4 deepens the fatherly tenderness with unforgettable images: 'I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms... I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.' God describes Himself teaching the child to walk, holding his small arms, lifting him to His cheek, bending down to feed him. This is parenthood at its most intimate.

The heartbreak is in 11:3: 'but they knew not that I healed them.' Every step the child took, every meal, every healing came from a Father they never recognized. They attributed it all to Baal. The deepest wound is not rebellion alone but unrecognized love, blessing received and credited to another.

The 'bands of love' are the opposite of the harsh yoke a master puts on an ox. God led His people not with cruelty but with kindness, lifting the yoke from their jaws to let them eat. This is how God deals with His own.

For us, the searching question is whether we have known that He healed us. How much of our life is the unrecognized gift of a Father bending down? Gratitude begins when we finally see the hands that have been holding us all along.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God pictures Himself teaching the child to walk, lifting and feeding him (11:3-4).
- 'They knew not that I healed them' names the wound of unrecognized love.
- 'Bands of love' contrast God's kindness with a harsh master's yoke.
- Crediting God's blessings to an idol is a deep and personal betrayal.

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life has God been 'teaching you to walk' in ways you only later recognized?
- What blessings might you have credited to luck, effort, or others rather than to God?
- How does seeing God's hidden care move you toward gratitude?

Question 9

Student Question:

In Hosea 11:1 God says, 'When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt,' words Matthew applies to Jesus in Matthew 2:15. How does Matthew's use of this verse show that Israel's whole story finds its true and faithful fulfillment in Christ, the obedient Son who succeeded where the nation failed, and what does it mean for us that we are saved by being joined to that faithful Son?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Then comes the great turning of the divine heart in Hosea 11:8-9: 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.' After all the warnings of judgment, God cries out from the depths of His own love. This is not weakness; it is the holy God revealing that He is also love.

God names cities of utter destruction, Admah and Zeboim (overthrown with Sodom, Deuteronomy 29:23), and recoils: 'How shall I make thee as Admah?' His justice is real, but His compassion will not let Him simply discard His people. 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger... for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee' (11:9).

Notice the reason God gives for mercy: 'for I am God, and not man.' A man might give up in disgust; a man might let wounded love curdle into vengeance. But God's holiness is precisely what makes His mercy reliable. He does not love the way exhausted human love runs out. This is the heartbeat of the whole book.

The teacher should let this passage land slowly. Judgment in Hosea is never the last word about God's people, because love is woven through the warning. The God who says 'they shall reap

the whirlwind' is the same God who says 'How shall I give thee up?' Both are true, and only the cross will finally show how they are held together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's heart 'turns within' Him; His compassion is real and intense (11:8).
- Admah and Zeboim recall total destruction; God recoils from making Israel like them.
- 'I am God, and not man' grounds mercy in God's holy, unwavering character.
- Judgment is never God's last word over His own people; love runs through the warning.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell us about God that His mercy flows from His being 'God, and not man'?
- How do you hold together God's certain judgment and His relentless love?
- Where do you most need to hear God say over you, 'How shall I give thee up?'

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Hosea 9 through 11, where God's deserved judgment never cancels His fatherly love ('How shall I give thee up?'), name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through this passage to trust the Father's heart even when you must face the consequences of your own sowing.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The unit closes in Hosea 11:10–11 with a note of hope: 'they shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion... then the children shall tremble from the west.' God promises that one day His scattered children will return, trembling like birds hurrying home, 'out of Egypt' and 'out of the land of Assyria,' and He will settle them again in their houses.

This restoration is real history, a true return from exile, but it points beyond itself. The prophets' promises of regathering and homecoming find their deepest fulfillment in Christ, who gathers a people from every nation into His church, the true and lasting home of God's children. The kingdom Hosea longs for is not a future earthly political nation but the reign of Christ now over His people, the church.

The 'roar of the lion' that draws the children home is the voice of God calling His people back. In the gospel age, that call goes out in the preaching of Christ crucified and risen, summoning sinners home to the Father. The homecoming Hosea foresaw is happening every time a wanderer returns to the Lord.

So the lesson ends where it must: with an open door. We have looked honestly at the seed and the harvest, the divided heart and the whirlwind. But over it all stands a Father whose final word

to His people is not exile but homecoming. The same voice that warned now calls. The only question left is whether we will walk after the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hosea 11:10–11 promises the scattered children will return home to God.
- The restoration is real history but points to its fullest fulfillment in Christ.
- The kingdom is the reign of Christ now over His church, not a future earthly political nation.
- The 'roar of the lion' is God's call home, sounded today in the gospel of Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Hosea's promise of homecoming find its deepest fulfillment in Christ and His church?
- What does it mean that God's final word over His people is homecoming, not exile?
- Is there a way the Lord is calling you home right now? How will you answer?