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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Prophets III

**HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, OBADIAH, JONAH, MICAH,
NAHUM, HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH,
HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI**

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Liguori
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:

Harry Grile, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Printed with Ecclesiastical Permission and Approved for Private or Instructional Use

Nihil Obstat: Rev. Msgr. Kevin Michael Quirk, JCD, JV
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: + Michael J. Bransfield
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston [West Virginia]
December 26, 2013

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Anderson, William Angor, 1937-
Prophets III : Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai,
Zechariah, Malachi / William A. Anderson, DMin, PhD.—First Edition.

pages cm
ISBN 978-0-7648-2137-0
1. Bible. Minor prophets—Textbooks. I. Title.
BS1560.A77 2014
224'.90071—dc23

2014006894

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2137-0
e ISBN 978-0-7648-6924-2

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Printed in the United States of America
18 17 16 15 14 / 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition



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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our head. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

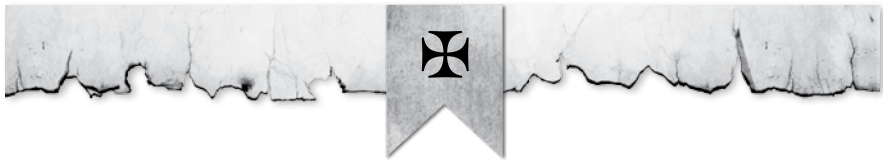
We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson but the first also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. In his April 12, 2013, address before the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Pope Francis stressed that "the Church's life and mission are founded on the Word of God which is the soul of theology and at the same time inspires the whole of Christian life."

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 15 includes an opening prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book

for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our heart and conscience to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.
3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' messages. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of the books of the minor prophets, becoming therefore more aware of the spiritual nourishment these books offer. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote and edited the books of the minor prophets, they were living at a time when other nations were invading and ravaging the land of the Israelites. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of the minor prophets, the book is divided into seven lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 7 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers the Book of Hosea 4 through 14. The study group reads and discusses only chapters 4 through 5:14 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on chapters 5:15 through 14 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the first format on page 13. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 13, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user-friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

divina (see page 8) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 8.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Read each Scripture passage aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflections (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✘ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✘ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✘ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✘ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✘ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✘ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✘ Use a clock or watch.
- ✘ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✘ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Prophets III" (page 16) before the first session.
- ✘ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✘ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to the Participants

- ✘ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✘ Read "Introduction: Prophets III" (page 16) before the first session.
- ✘ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✘ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance.

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

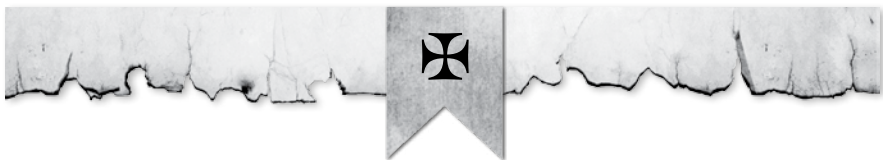
Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Prophets III

HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, OBADIAH, JONAH, MICAH,
NAHUM, HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH,
HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI

Read this overview before the first session.

The Word of the Lord came to the Israelites through the prophets. Because the prophets had to warn the people about the destruction they would soon endure, the prophets were often disliked and threatened. Totally dedicated to the Lord and the covenant, the true prophets courageously conveyed the Word of the Lord to the people despite rejection, persecution, and possible death.

Major and Minor Prophets

Among the prophetic books, there are four major and twelve minor prophetic writings. The terms major and minor refer to the length of the writings. The major prophets include the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The minor prophets include the writings of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

This volume of the *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series will examine the writings of the twelve minor prophets.

Historical Perspective

The Syro-Ephraimite War: In 735–734 BC, Syria and Ephraim feared the impending invasion of the powerful Assyrian army and joined together to fight the Assyrians. When speaking about the northern kingdom of Israel, the prophets often used the name Ephraim, the largest city in the northern kingdom, to represent Israel. Syria was also known as Aram. Leaders of the Syrian-Israel alliance asked King Ahaz of Judah to engage his forces to help the alliance fend off the Assyrians, but Ahaz refused.

The kings of Syria and Israel, unhappy with King Ahaz's refusal, fought against Judah with the hope of removing the king and placing a king more favorable to their cause on the throne. At the beginning of the invasion, Judah lost many warriors and called on the Assyrians for help. With the help of the Assyrians, Judah was able to successfully defend itself against the Syro-Ephraimite force. But the alliance with Assyria left Judah as a vassal of Assyria, compelling Judah to pay an excessive tribute to the Assyrians.

Assyrian Domination: In 721 BC, the Assyrian army conquered and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, forcing many of its inhabitants to flee to the southern kingdom of Judah. Most of those who did not escape from Israel were sent into exile in other lands conquered by the Assyrians, where they intermarried with the natives of the area. Exiles from other countries were brought to the northern kingdom and forced to intermarry with the Israelites who remained in the north.

Babylonian Domination: The Babylonians (Chaldeans) became a dominant power during the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ. The Assyrian Empire was no longer a feared powerful empire, and the Babylonians had become a constant threat and thorn in the side of the cities of Judah. The powerful Babylonians forced Judah into paying an excessive tribute after invading the area. In an attempt to break away from the control of the Babylonians, the king of Judah incited a rebellion against the Babylonians, leading the Babylonian nation to invade and devastate the land in 587 BC. The destruction of Jerusalem, its Temple, and the

cities of Judah was a horrible and frightening experience for the people of Judah who survived. The Babylonians led many people of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah into exile in Babylon. Others managed to flee to neighboring countries where they were often not welcomed.

In 538 BC, Cyrus the Great of Persia defeated the Babylonians, and the exiled people of Judah were allowed to return to their homeland from all the countries in which they lived. Many returned, while many others remained in the country they had known since birth. During the period after their return from exile, the people of Judah rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple, their most sacred place of worship.



LESSON 2

The Book of Hosea (II)

HOSEA 4—14

Who is wise enough to understand these things? Who is intelligent enough to know them? Straight are the paths of the LORD, the just walk in them, but sinners stumble in them (14:10).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 15)

Context

Part 1: Hosea 4—5:14 The people of the northern kingdom of Israel break the commandments of the Lord, and the Lord punishes them with complete devastation. The people lack knowledge of God because the priests, who also lack this knowledge, did not fulfill their task and teach the people. Because the people turn to idol worship, the Lord punishes them.

Part 2: Hosea 5:15—14 The Lord desires loyalty from the Israelites, not sacrifice. When the Lord would have healed them and taken them back, they choose wickedness, making alliances with other nations and accepting the gods of other nations. They violate the covenant by worshiping idols made by human hands, thus prostituting themselves in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord will punish them for their sinfulness. Although the Lord cares for them like a loving parent, they become unfaithful and proud.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (HOSEA 4—5:14)

Read aloud Hosea 4—5:14.

4 Guilt of the Nation

The author begins this passage by using the expression, “Hear the Word of the LORD,” which indicates the Lord is about to proclaim oracles directed to Israel. The first oracle is against all the people of Israel, accusing them of lacking fidelity, loyalty, or knowledge of God, which resulted in their swearing, lying, murdering, stealing, and adultery. The people had to be aware of these sins, since they were obviously against the commandments God gave to Moses (see Exodus 20:1–17). As a result of the sinfulness of the people, the Lord will punish them by drying up the land and causing all those dwelling in the land to perish, including the beasts of the land, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea. The devastation shall envelop everything, on land, in the sky, and under the water.

The Lord’s anger then turned against the priest and prophet of Israel whom the Lord accused of sinning day and night. Because of this sinfulness, the Lord will make an end to the priest’s mother, which appears to be a reference to the end of the priestly line. Because both priest and prophet rejected knowledge of the Lord and damaged the life of the people by not instructing them about God, the Lord will reject the priest and prophet. The knowledge of God refers to knowledge of the law of God. Because the priest forgot the law of the Lord, the Lord will forget his children. Forgetting the law of the Lord means the priest knew the law, but chose to ignore it.

The more the priests multiplied, the more they sinned against the Lord. The Lord threatens to change their glory into shame. The meaning of the word “glory” in this passage is vague, referring either to the children or to the Lord whom they are rejecting.

The priests greedily “feed on the sin of [the Lord’s] people” (4:8), literally eating the food offered as sacrifice and worshiping idols. The Lord will punish the priests, who are no better than the people. In their prostitution (their worship of false idols), the priests will eat without being satisfied

and promote prostitution while receiving nothing in return. Because they abandoned the Lord in worshipping idols, they will find themselves unfulfilled. In their false worship, they drink wine, aged or newly pressed, leaving them without any understanding of the one true God, as though they were drunk. The passage warns the priests the more they worship false gods, the more their knowledge of the God of Israel will waste away.

The Lord accuses the priests of foolishly consulting an empty piece of wood or a wand used by sorcerers as a guide. In places of worship on mountaintops or in the shade of trees, they offer sacrifice. Their daughters prostitute themselves, and their daughters-in-law commit adultery, meaning all the people of Israel worship false gods. Using the image of daughters and daughters-in-law stresses the practice of the era of punishing women rather than men for sexual sins. Because the Israelites were not taught knowledge of God by the priests, the Lord will not hold the people responsible (daughters and daughters-in-law), but the Lord will punish the men (priests) who consort with Temple women. Consortng not only includes worship of a false god, but also sexual sharing as part of a fertility rite.

The Lord warns Israel not to think Judah is sharing in their prostitution, a sign the editor is writing from Judah. The Lord commands the people of Israel not to go to their shrines at Gilgal and Beth-aven, which were the shrines where the northern tribes worshiped the Lord and which have become places of idol worship.

The Lord tells the people of Israel they are not to use the expression, "As the Lord lives" (4:15), which was ordinarily used to support an oath. Since the people of Israel abandoned the Lord, they should not use this saying to support the truth of their oath. The Lord compares Israel to a stubborn cow that the Lord will not bring to pasture with lambs. Since the people show they love the shame of their prostitution more than honor, the Lord declares Ephraim is bound to idols. Ephraim, the largest tribe of the northern kingdom, is one of the names Hosea uses when referring to the kingdom of Israel. The Lord sadly declares the wind (spirit) and the altars of idolatry have captured the hearts of the people.

5:1–14 Upheaval in Israel

The Lord calls upon the leaders of Israel, the priests, the elders, and the king to listen to the Word of the Lord. They have the responsibility of exercising judgment on the people, not just juridical judgment, but the protection of the moral and religious life of the people. Instead of bringing right judgment, they have led the people into idolatry. The Lord names three places where the people of Israel practiced idolatry, namely Mizpah, Tabor, and Shittim. Because of their idol worship, the Lord will now punish all the people.

As a result of their prostitution, Ephraim and all of Israel are possessed with the spirit of idolatry. Since they no longer know the Lord, their deeds blind them from returning to the Lord. Their arrogance and sinfulness become a witness against them. The author writes that the Lord asserts Judah will fall with them. The people will bring their animals for sacrifice to the Lord, but they will discover the Lord has abandoned them. They have borne illegitimate children, who are born for idolatry. In other words, the practice of idolatry will pass on from parents to children. The feast of the new moon, which is ordinarily a time of celebration for the Israelites, will now be a time of ruin.

The Lord warns the people of the tribe of Benjamin to look behind them. The image of the people looking behind them appears to refer to a war between the northern and southern kingdoms known as the Syro-Ephraimite War (see “Introduction: Prophets III,” page 16). The tribe of Benjamin ordinarily belonged to the kingdom of Judah, but it appears the northern tribe of Israel at some time annexed Benjamin into its kingdom. Benjamin, on the border between the northern and southern kingdoms, would be the first tribe attacked in a war between the two kingdoms. Toward the end of the Syro-Ephraimite War, Judah attacked the tribe of Benjamin, which belonged to the northern kingdom.

Since Assyria sought to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, they willingly joined forces with Judah at the time of the Syro-Ephraimite War. After Judah protected itself against the forces of the north in the Syro-Ephraimite war, Assyria conquered and destroyed the northern kingdom

in 721 BC. The Lord predicted Ephraim (Israel) would become a wasteland on the day the Lord punishes them.

Since Judah did not support Ephraim against the Assyrians, the Lord punished Judah because they became like those who move boundary lines. The boundaries of the tribes of the Israelites had become sacred to the Lord, and the Lord appears to blame Judah for not protecting the boundaries of Israel. In the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord decreed those people cursed who moved a person's boundary markers (see Deuteronomy 27:17). Because Israel went after "filth" (false gods), the Lord also casts a severe judgment on them.

Before the Syro-Ephraimite war, Ephraim was a vassal of Assyria and was forced to pay tribute to Assyria. When Judah sought Assyria's help in fighting the Syro-Ephraimite war, Judah became a vassal of Assyria and had to pay tribute to Assyria. To the people of Israel and Judah, the Lord, like a lion tearing apart and carrying away its prey, was punishing both nations.

Review Questions

1. What are the sins of the people of the northern tribe of Israel?
2. How would you apply the idea "knowledge of God," as used in this text, to situations in the world today?
3. How have the priests sinned against the people?
4. Is the Lord fair by being more lenient in punishing the people (the daughters) than in punishing the priests (the men)?
5. Why did the Lord punish Ephraim and Judah?

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 15)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 8)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 8 for further instruction.)

Guilt of the Nation (4)

John Henry Cardinal Newman spoke of two types of faith: notional faith and real faith. Notional faith involves people who claim to believe in God but exhibit no signs of their belief in daily life. Real faith is a belief influencing every aspect of a person's life. People with notional faith may easily become captured by the spirit of the world while neglecting the spirit of God. The priests in the Book of Hosea are examples of a notional faith about God, knowledge of God that has no impact on their life. They have nothing to teach the Israelites.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Upheaval in Israel (5:1–14)

When a company's leader retires, many of the workers who had difficulty with him or her celebrate the departure. Others in the company, however, may fear life will become more difficult under their new boss. They may speak an oft-heard saying: "The devil you get may be worse than the devil you have."

Judah needed help from the Assyrians and became a vassal of the king of Assyria, who drained Judah of its wealth. In times of turmoil, nations often formed foolish alliances, trusting in material strength while forgetting about the importance of the Lord and the power of prayer. In our current era, Pope Francis asked people throughout the world to pray and fast for peace. This is a powerful and safe weapon against an enemy.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (HOSEA 5:15—14)

Day 1: The Crimes of Israel (5:15—7)

Although the author makes no mention of a lion in the following passage, he links the passage with the previous passage in which the Lord is compared to a lion. Like a lion returning to its lair, the Lord will leave the people until they repent and seek the Lord, which will happen when they realize their need of the Lord in the midst of their suffering. The Lord struck them down, and the Lord will give them life again. The presumptuous Israelites believe the Lord will come after two days, raising them up on the third day. The days are not considered exact predictions of a period of time, but rather a period of devastation followed by a period of revival, like the coming of dawn or like a spring rain refreshing the earth.

The Lord, recognizing the fickleness of Ephraim and Judah, proclaims their loyalty to be as fading as the morning mist and dew that disappear early. Because of their fickleness, the warnings of punishment given by the prophets were fulfilled. The Lord desires loyalty and a living knowledge of God, not empty sacrifices and burnt offerings.

The Lord declares the Israelites violated the covenant at a place named Adam, which was close to the area where the Israelites crossed the Jordan when they entered the Promised Land (see Joshua 3:16). The places once used in the northern kingdom for the worship of the true God (Gilead and Shechem) are now places for evildoers, with the priests committing terrible crimes, waiting like bandits to murder the people on the road to Shechem. The Lord is witnessing the horrible prostitution defiling Ephraim (Israel). Besides the punishment in store for the northern kingdom of Israel, the Lord has also passed judgment on Judah.

In chapter 7, the Lord speaks of being prepared to restore the good fortunes of Israel and heal her wounds, but the Lord witnessed the falsehood, the thievery, and banditry of Ephraim and Samaria (another name used by Hosea in referring to Israel). The people seem to believe the Lord forgets their crimes, but their sins are all around them, in the sight of the Lord.

The Lord sees their wickedness that makes kings rejoice and princes

act with treachery. In the period between the death of King Jeroboam II (743 BC) and the fall of Samaria (721 BC), nearly all the kings of Israel were murdered. Because of the treachery and murder of the kings and princes, the Lord speaks of them as adulterers who were like a blazing oven which the baker stops stoking after kneading the dough. A baker keeps the oven warm with the intention of helping the dough rise without baking the bread. When the baker decides to stoke it again, the fire in the oven is ready to again blaze up. Like this oven, the treachery of the people lingers and can blaze up at any time.

The Lord speaks of the princes becoming sick with poisoned wine “on the day of our king” (7:5). The expression “on the day of our king” appears to refer to the inauguration feast of the king. The poisoned wine drunk by the princes points to the treachery in their plans to kill the king. During the night, their anger is subdued by sleep, but in the morning it flares up again like an oven, and they consume (kill) their rulers.

The Lord states the people of Ephraim align themselves with other nations, an action that includes aligning themselves with the gods of other nations. Ephraim becomes as worthless as an unturned cake, which is burned on one side and not cooked on the other. The foreign nations have consumed the power of the people of Ephraim, who take no notice of it. In their pride, they do not turn back to the Lord.

The people of Israel are like a silly and senseless dove that is easily captured. Instead of trusting the Lord, they seek help from Egypt and pay tribute to Assyria. The Lord will bring them down in a net like the birds of the air and punish them when they assemble. Because they rebelled against the Lord, ruin will come upon them.

Although the Lord wished to redeem them, they told lies about the Lord, saying the Lord abandoned them and refusing to plead with the Lord when they were in anguish. When they worshiped idols, they consumed the wheat and wine offered to them and ritually lacerated themselves with the hope of gaining a good harvest from the idols. Despite the training and strength they received from the Lord, they plotted evil against the Lord and became as useless as a defective bow. Because they refused to learn the language of the Egyptians, the Egyptians will ridicule them.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The kings of Israel turned to false gods. In time, they were cheating and killing. Some of them became king by killing the previous king. Their life became a good example of the ripple effect of sin. Once they accept sin in their life, other sins often follow. In worshipping idols, the kings of Israel turned against the Lord, forgetting all the Lord had done for them. Although the author of Hosea speaks of the Lord punishing the people, the reality is the people punished themselves by sinning and causing grief and hardship for others. All nations that forget about the Lord or worship a false image of a vengeful and unloving God seem to cause great pain for the world and themselves, even today.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: From Glory to Corruption (8—9)

The Lord urges the people to sound the alarm, a trumpet blast warning the inhabitants the Assyrian army is soaring over the house of Israel like an eagle as punishment for discarding the covenant and rebelling against the law of the Lord. Although the people stress their familiarity with the Lord, they actually reject the Lord, placing themselves at the mercy of the enemy. The people of Israel chose kings and princes, but without the authority or knowledge (permission) of the Lord. Because they sinned by using their silver and gold to shape idols for themselves, they will experience devastation.

The Lord rejected worship of the image of the calf, introduced by King Jeroboam I in Samaria (Israel) after the separation of Israel from the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord's anger will turn against them. He will ask how long they will be incapable of innocence. Artisans have made the image of the calf, which is no god and which will be shattered. Their worship of the calf will be like sowing in the wind, which the Lord will make a whirlwind of punishment on the people. Like wheat having no heads, the Israelites shall be useless. Even if the people of Israel were

to flourish, their enemies will devour them, and they will be as worthless as useless vessels. They sought help from Assyria like a wandering wild ass, bargaining for lovers (supporters in battle). When they seek the help of other nations, the kings and princes of these nations will crush them.

In making many altars, which the Israelites believed would rid them of their sins, they were actually building altars to idols, thus sinning. Although the Lord in the past decreed laws for them, they became strangers to the Lord, loving to sacrifice meat and eat it, but the Lord is not pleased with their sacrifices. The Lord will punish their sinfulness and return them to Egypt, the land from which Moses led them. Israel ignored the Lord and built forbidden palaces. Judah also built fortified cities, and the Lord will send fire upon them and devour their fortifications. The Babylonians would set Judah ablaze during the invasion of the land.

In chapter 9, the Lord warns Israel not to rejoice like other nations. They have prostituted themselves, abandoning the Lord, enjoying a prostitute's fee on every threshing floor. Since the threshing took place at the time of harvest, the image of the threshing floor appears to be an allusion to a harvesting festival in honor of Baal. The Lord declares the wine from the harvest will not nourish them.

The people of Ephraim will no longer dwell in the land given them by the Lord, but some will return to Egypt and others will be brought to Assyria where they will eat unclean food. They will not pour out libations to the Lord and their sacrifices will not please the Lord. In exile, they will eat mourners' bread, the food eaten at funerals, making those who eat it unclean. Mourners' bread was considered unclean because anything eaten in the presence of a corpse was unclean. The forbidden food will be for those sinners who are hungry for it, but it cannot be brought into the house of the Lord.

The Lord asks what they would do on the festival day of the Lord, an apparent reference to the Israelite autumnal feast of Booths. When they flee from the devastation of the Lord, Egypt will receive them and Memphis will bury them. Memphis, known for its grand tombs, is in Egypt. The desolation will become evident as weeds grow over their silver treasures and thorns cover their tents.

The days of punishment and repayment will come upon them. They will call the prophet a fool and a madman, refusing to listen to him. The prophet is a watchman of Ephraim, yet the trap is all around, ready to ensnare him. Since the people of Ephraim have sunk into the depths of corruption, the Lord will punish them for their iniquity.

The Lord recalls the era when Israel was like grapes in the desert because of the protection of the Lord. The Lord protected their ancestors like the first fruits of a fig tree. When they came to the place called Baal-peor, they consecrated themselves to the Shameful One (Baal) and became as abhorrent as the thing they desired. Baal-peor was where the Israelites consecrated themselves for the first time to Baal. Ephraim is like a bird, whose glory flies away and who is no longer able to conceive or give birth. Even if they have children, the Lord will destroy them until no one survives. The Lord declares, at one time Ephraim was like a tree that had been planted in a meadow, and now the children of Ephraim will be slaughtered. The Lord will give them a womb which will miscarry and breasts which are dry.

The Lord rejected the people of Ephraim at Gilgal, a place where they practiced idolatry. Because of their wickedness, they will be driven out of the Lord's house. The Lord will reject their rebellious leaders and no longer love the people. The root of Ephraim is dried up, unable to bear fruit. Even if they were to bear children, the Lord will slay them. Because they refused to listen to the Lord, the Lord will disown them and make them "wanderers among the nations" (9:17).

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The people of the northern kingdom of Israel need the help of the Lord, and they cry out they know the Lord, but in reality, they do not know the Lord. They are familiar with the Lord, but their knowledge of the Lord does not keep them from worshiping false gods. True knowledge of the Lord demands more than rubbing shoulders with the Lord. It demands living and worshiping as the Lord wishes and

avoiding the worship of false idols such as greed, illicit pleasure, and the many other temptations we experience in life.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 3: Punishment of Israel's Wickedness (10)

Israel is like an abundant vine covered with fruit. The more plentiful its fruit, the more altars it built, and the more productive the land, the more sacred pillars it constructed. Sacred pillars were established for worship, very often for the worship of false gods, although the Israelites set up sacred pillars in honor of the Lord of Israel when they first entered the Promised Land. At the time Hosea wrote this book, the people of Israel were unfaithful to the Lord and were building altars and pillars to false gods. Because the Israelites abandoned faith in the Lord, the Lord will smash their altars and sacred pillars.

In the desolation arising from the corruption of Israel and the power of the Assyrians invading the land, the people proclaim they have no king, a sign the king is too politically weak to fulfill his duties, or a sign no king sits on the throne. The Lord is the real king of Israel, but the people lack both respect for the Lord and the faith to trust the Lord can help them. The people make empty promises, swear false oaths, and enter into sinful covenants. Lawsuits arise like poisonous weeds, indicating that the power to administer justice no longer exists.

The inhabitants of Samaria (Israel) and the priests of the false gods mourn over the calf of Beth-aven, an idol taken to Assyria as an offering to the king of Assyria. Since many of the idols were covered with gold, silver, and other forms of jewelry, nations often confiscated the precious idols of the conquered nations. Assyria's capture of the calf brought shame to the people of Israel who, without faith in the God of the Israelites, are left stranded.

Israel and its king will disappear like a twig in water and the places of idol worship, where the Israelites sinned, will be destroyed, their altars overrun with thorns and thistles. The destruction refers to the Assyrian subjugation of Israel which was to take place in 721 BC. The devastation

of the land will be so horrible the people will cry out to the mountains and hills to crumble and cover them.

The Lord declares Israel has sinned since the days of Gibeah, a place where the tribes of Israel sinned by fighting among themselves (see Judges 20). The Lord chastises the people of Israel by inciting other nations against them in payment for two crimes, which were not identified.

The Lord pictures the early days of Ephraim, portraying it as a trained young cow which had not yet given birth, enjoying the work of threshing the wheat. The Lord “laid a yoke upon her beautiful neck” (10:11), signaling the power of the Lord over the people. All the tribes of the Israelites worked on the land, planting justice, and reaping loyalty. They prepared a new field and sought the Lord who would come and rain justice on them.

Unfortunately, Ephraim plowed evil, harvested wickedness, and ate the fruit of falsehood. Because the people of Israel trusted their own power and army, the Lord foretells a time when war will break out and all their fortresses will be destroyed. Hosea writes about a battle involving Salman, who ravaged Beth-arbel. Just as this bloody battle involved killing mothers and children, so it will happen for Bethel because of the wickedness of the people. At dawn, the king of Israel will disappear. Dawn was usually depicted in the Bible as a time pointing to a renewal by the Lord, but in this passage, it becomes a prediction of a new and tragic period for the people of Israel.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

During the Depression, many wealthy people lost most of their money after the stock market crashed. As a result, a number of them, whose aim in life centered on gaining wealth, committed suicide. They made their wealth their god, and when their god was lost, they lost all incentive for living.

Similarly, the people of Israel had abandoned the God of Israel and set their hearts on worshiping an idol representing Baal. When the Assyrians took their idol from them, they had no one left to worship.

Jesus foresaw the human tendency of making wealth a god and he wisely warns us to establish for ourselves a lasting treasure. He realized people put a great deal of energy into their heart's desire, whether that desire be wealth, popularity, or some other form of personal gain. He tells us to set our hearts on storing up treasures in heaven, adding, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Matthew 6:21). No one can take that treasure from us.

✂ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: A Parent for Israel (11—12)

Hosea portrays the Lord as a parent speaking of Israel as a child, a reference to the era when the Lord led the Israelites out of Egypt. The Lord often called them, but the more the Lord called, the farther away they went, sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Like a loving parent, the Lord taught the people of Ephraim how to walk in the Lord's presence.

Although they were taken into the loving arms of the Lord, the people of Ephraim did not understand how much the Lord cared for them. The Lord drew them lovingly to himself, "with bands of love" (11:4). In a previous passage, the Lord put a yoke on the people, but here the Lord leads them with a band of love, an expression which connotes a more gentle approach to leading the people. Continuing to use the image of a loving parent, the Lord speaks of caring for the people like those who lift children to their cheeks and who bend down to feed them.

Unfortunately, the people of Ephraim rejected the Lord, who must now become a punishing parent. Since the people refuse to repent of their wickedness, the Lord will return the people back to Egypt and will place others under the rule of Assyria. The sword will destroy the diviners of the false gods and devour the people because of their devious ways. The Lord's people have chosen apostasy by denying the Lord and worshiping false gods. Even if the people call out to the God of Israel with one voice, the Lord will not lift them up from their desolation.

After this warning, the Lord relents, asking how the God of Israel, like a parent, could deliver up Israel and treat the people like those who live

in Admah or Zeboiim. Admah and Zeboiim were cities near Sodom and Gomorrah who shared in the destruction of those two cities.

Unable to remain angry with the people, the Lord takes pity on Ephraim, declaring Ephraim will not be destroyed again. When the Lord speaks of Ephraim in this passage, the reference is to the people of Ephraim who fled from Israel when the Assyrians invaded.

Since the Lord is God, the Holy One, and not a human being, the Lord will not act in a human manner, seeking revenge. When the Lord roars like a lion over the land, the children of God will come full of fear and trembling like birds and doves from Assyria, from the west and from Egypt. The Lord will resettle the people of Israel in their homes. Many of the people of the northern tribe of Israel fled to Judah and Israelite colonies in Egypt at the time of the Assyrian invasion. At the end of the Babylonian exile, the Lord directed the Israelites to return and settle in Judah as a unified nation, which included those from the northern kingdom of Israel and those from the southern kingdom of Judah.

In chapter 12, the Lord contrasts the faithfulness of Judah with the deceit of Ephraim. Listing some of the infidelities of Ephraim, the Lord declares Ephraim has become a deceitful nation, negotiating with other nations and accepting their gods. Judah, on the other hand, has remained faithful to the Lord and to the “holy ones,” a reference to the subordinate lower gods of the divine council. Ephraim sinned by making a covenant with Assyria and Egypt instead of trusting in the Lord.

Hosea, speaking the Lord’s message, reverses some incidents found in the Book of Genesis to convey the message of this chapter, which is a message of infidelity on the part of Israel and Judah. The Lord has a disagreement with the Israelites, referred to in this passage under the name of Jacob. An angel of the Lord changed Jacob’s name to Israel (see Genesis 32:23–29). The Lord will repay Jacob for his devious conduct, meaning a punishment for all Israelites. The passage refers to the birth of Jacob. Esau, Jacob’s twin, was born first and had the right to the inheritance, but Jacob was born clutching the heel of Esau. In Hosea, the Lord claims Jacob supplanted his brother, even in the womb (see Genesis 25:21–26). Jacob will later deceive his blind father, Isaac, who mistakenly blesses

Jacob as his heir rather than Esau, the firstborn (see Genesis 27:1–45).

As a grown man, Jacob wrestled with an angel all night and prevailed (see Genesis 32:23–31). Jacob wept and entreated the angel, a reference to his pleading prayer. Jacob then declared he saw God face to face and lived. At Bethel, Jacob vows, “the LORD will be my God” (Genesis 28:21). Since Hosea is viewing Jacob in a negative manner, deserving of punishment, he could be implying Jacob’s vow was insincere or simply another trick. In Hosea, the Lord states Jacob (the Israelites) must return to the God of their ancestors, living with loyalty, faithfulness, and hope in the Lord.

The Lord compares Ephraim to a cheating merchant who holds a false balance in his hands, extorting wealth from the people and bragging how rich he has become. The Lord declares his riches shall not purchase forgiveness for sin. Hosea notes the Lord claimed to be the God of the Israelites from the time they left Egypt, and the Lord now predicts they will again live in tents as they do when celebrating the feast of Booths. For seven days, the Jewish people live in tents (booths) to commemorate the time the Israelites lived in tents in the desert.

Throughout the ages, the Lord continued to speak to the people through the prophets who received visions and parables. Since the people did not listen to the prophets, their words came to nothing.

The Israelites would construct a mound of stone as a sacred pillar and a sign of a covenant between people. The Lord declares the signs of covenants of peace were stones placed in a mound to represent a sacred pillar. The Lord protests they are falsehoods, just a heap of stones which mean nothing. The Lord continued to send prophets to Israel. After deceiving his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing, Jacob had to flee to Aram where he became a servant tending sheep for the sake of receiving a wife (see Genesis 28:5, 29:15–30, 30:31). The story of Jacob and his sons eventually leads the whole nation to settle in Egypt. Through Moses, who is considered a prophet, the Lord brought Israel out of the slavery of Egypt and tended the people.

Hosea abruptly adds that Ephraim aroused the anger of the Lord who cast blood guilt on him to repay him for his guilt. This passage lays the groundwork for the next chapter.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

A common experience for many parents is the rebellion of a child or children, usually during their teenage years. The parents love them, but when their children reject the authority and love of the parents, parents find themselves confused and helpless.

The God of Israel has the same experience with Judah and Israel, the Lord's special children. Just as many parents realize they lost control of their children and must allow them to suffer their own consequences, so the Lord does the same with the Israelites. History, in fact, shows the Lord does the same with all of creation. The Lord loves us and wants us to respond with love and obedience. We are left with the choice of accepting or rejecting God's love for us.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 5: Sin and New Life (13—14)

Since this chapter consists of several oracles of the Lord placed together, it sometimes becomes confusing whether the Lord is speaking of a specific tribe of Israel or of all the people of Israel.

The Lord speaks of Ephraim as the strongest of the northern tribes, with an exalted position among the tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel, but Ephraim brought spiritual death to itself by worshiping Baal. Although Hosea often referred to all of Israel when speaking of Ephraim, he here refers to the tribe of Ephraim in contrast to the other tribes of the northern kingdom. Ephraim worships idols made by artisans, offers sacrifices to the idols, and follows the ritual of kissing the molten calf. Because of the sins of the people of Ephraim, they will pass away like a morning cloud, the dew, chaff from the threshing floor, or smoke out of a window. The Lord reminds them that ever since they left Egypt, the Lord has been their God, their own savior, unlike the gods they do not know.

Hosea now includes all of Israel in the following oracle. Although the Lord satisfied the hunger and thirst of the Israelites in the desert by

providing for their needs, they became proud and forgot the Lord. As a result, the Lord pledges to become like a lion, a leopard, or a bear to “tear their hearts from their breasts” (13:8). Like a wild animal, a lion, the Lord shall rip them open and devour them.

The Lord taunts Israel, asking where is their new king who will rescue them when the Lord destroys them. They wanted kings and princes to lead them, so the Lord in a rage gave them kings and took them away in anger. The giving and taking of kings and princes may be a reference to the line of kings of Israel who were killed one after another. The Lord compares Israel to an unwise child who refuses to be born when the time comes and chooses instead to remain in the womb of their wickedness. When the time comes for birth and the child refuses to leave the womb, the mother and the child die. The Lord will condemn Ephraim to death (Sheol), asking if they expect the Lord to redeem them when they choose to remain in their sin and not come to birth by returning to the Lord. Lacking compassion for these sinful people, the Lord will call upon the plague and sting of death to come upon the people.

Hosea returns to speaking about Ephraim as a specific tribe in Israel. Although Ephraim shall flourish and be exalted among his brother tribes, an east wind (Assyria) will come from the Lord to consume the land, the water, and the treasure of the people. Thus, chapter 14 begins with Samaria (Israel), guilty of rebelling against the Lord, destroyed, their children smashed to pieces and their pregnant women ripped open. If Ephraim cannot withstand the onslaught of the Assyrians, the rest of Israel will certainly succumb.

Hosea becomes the one who speaks in 14:2, calling the people to return to the Lord, their God, reminding them of their downfall due to their sinfulness. When they return to the Lord, they are to beg the Lord to forgive their wickedness and to offer the Lord what is good, not an offering of first fruits, but an offering of the fruit of their lips, their words. They know neither an alliance with Assyria nor the power of horses will save them. Idols will not help them, but the Lord alone, who has compassion for the orphan, will help them.

The Lord responds to the people's pleas, promising to heal their apostasy, love them freely, and abandon all anger against them. The Lord will bring new life, like dew for Israel who will blossom like a lily. Israel will become as fertile as the cedars of Lebanon, and its shoots will reach out. Israel's splendor shall be like the olive tree and its fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. The people will live in the shade of Israel, raising grain, blossoming like the vine, and becoming as well known as the wine of Lebanon. The Lord has humbled Ephraim and rejected his idols, and the Lord will now be to them "like a verdant cypress tree" and provide fruit for the people.

In a short epilogue, Hosea asks who is wise enough to understand these things, stating a lesson learned from this book, namely the paths of the Lord in which the just walk are straight, while sinners stumble.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

In the Book of Hosea, the prophet is teaching us the need for patience in trusting the Lord and not making the material goods of the world our gods. Wisdom tells us not to ignore the needs of our daily life, but it also tells us to make the Lord a living presence in all the decisions of our life. An underlying message is to trust the love of God, to pray, and to live our life as people faithful to the Lord. As Hosea says, "Straight are the paths of the LORD" (14:10).

✕ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. How does Hosea apply the image of Ephraim being like an "unturned cake" (7:8)?
2. Why did the Lord grow angry when Ephraim sought help from other nations like Assyria and Egypt?
3. What does Hosea say about the Lord's concern for the people and their response (see 9:10)?
4. What does the image of the Lord as a parent tell us about the anguish of the Lord concerning Ephraim?