

## RETURN TO LOVE AND JUSTICE

**BIBLE BASIS:** Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14

**BIBLE TRUTH:** God exhorts the people of Israel to return to obeying and worshiping Him.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually” (Hosea 12:6, KJV).

**LESSON AIM:** By the end of the lesson, we will: **COMPARE** prosperity as a worldly goal with

the godly virtues of love and justice; **REGRET** the occasions where have made material prosperity a key goal; and **PRACTICE** love and justice as key virtues.

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:** Read Hosea 11-12 and incorporate the insights gained from the Background Scriptures into your study of the lesson.

### LESSON SCRIPTURE

#### HOSEA 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14, KJV

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.

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

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: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

12:1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant

with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.

13 And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.

14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him.

### LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

**AIM: Students will understand that God demands the obedience of His people.**

### INTRODUCTION

#### Divided Worship, Divided Kingdom

The book of Hosea illustrates a time when the people of Israel had been unfaithful to God through worship. They sought out relationships with Assyria and Egypt that were not approved by God, all in pursuit of military gain, and subjected themselves to improper worship of Baal. Throughout the story of Hosea, God has shown His commitment to the people of Israel, and yet they continue to both reject His love and disobey His commands. The Northern Kingdom managed to remain vibrant and alive for only two centuries, in large part because its leaders failed to teach the people of Israel how to seek and follow after God. Hosea predicted the downfall of Israel when Shalmaneser of Assyria conquered it and shortly after Judah went into captivity. In many ways, today's passages show how God is lamenting the frustrations of a people who continued to defile the meaning of worship. In **chapter 12**, Jacob, who later was renamed Israel, practiced deceit and yet was the common ancestor of all the 12 Tribes of Israel. Jacob, however, diligent in his desire to seek God, wrestled with the angel to receive his blessings. Jacob's ancestors named in this text remained under the belief that their benefits would be a direct result of their success, without help from

God. Jacob attempted to cleanse his home of idol worship (**Genesis 35:2**); however, his descendants remained steadfast in their worshiping of idols. As result, dishonesty, as noted by Jacob's past, became the norm in how people attained their wealth.

### BIBLE LEARNING

**AIM: Students will find that God is gracious with His people, yet demands pure worship and proper obedience.**

### I. ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE (Hosea 11:1–2)

God has, in many ways, envisioned the relationship that He maintained with Israel as similar to that of a parent and a stubborn child. God reemphasizes the love He possesses for His children despite the many times that the children of Israel continuously disobeyed God even after being brought out of Egypt (**vv. 1–2**). God continued to restore the people of Israel, and in many ways, this sets up the narrative for the Messiah that would come and offer reconciliation and hope.

**11:1 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.**

**Chapter 11** begins with the imagery of a court of law where God as His own witness seems to state His case, as it were, against His people, Israel. Indeed, this sounds more like a lament of a father who is disappointed over his son's behavior than a charge against his own son. The Lord calls to mind His fatherly dealings with Israel and their stubbornness and rebellion against Him. Here we have a picture of a father's tender love for his child—the Lord as the father and Israel the child—of which He often employs to describe His relationship with Israel (**Exodus 4:22–23; Isaiah 1:2–4**). The phrase “When Israel was a child, then I loved him” refers to the formative years of Israel as a nation in Egypt during and after the time



of Joseph and his generation. The Hebrew verb translated “love” here is *‘ahab* (aw-HAB), which means “to have affection,” with the idea of like or to have a close and intimate relationship.

The effect of God’s loving affection for Israel is both implicitly and explicitly stated. Firstly, implicitly stated, “then I loved him” implies the Lord blessed Israel economically and numerically multiplied them after the death of Joseph and his generation (**Exodus 1:6–10**). The Egyptians’ envious response resulted in the imposition of hard labor, torture, and bondage of Israel under the Egyptians. Secondly, explicitly expressed, God demonstrated His love for Israel by redeeming them from their bondage in Egypt—known as the Exodus. This is captured in the phrase “out of Egypt.” Egypt is being geographically, spiritually, and symbolically used here. Egypt was the geographical land from where Israel is physically liberated; it also symbolized idolatry, the worship of many gods and idols from which the Lord delivered Israel. In addition, Egypt represented bondage, torture, and suffering. The phrase, therefore, speaks of complete deliverance from bondage to new life in the Promised Land. The phrase is quoted concerning Jesus (**Matthew 2:15**). The love that led God to deliver Israel from Egypt is the same that made Him call His Son from Egypt to do the work of redemption among His people.

However, Israel did not appreciate or reciprocate God’s love for them. Rather, the more He loved and called them, the further they wandered away from God and worshiped the images of Baal (**vv. 2–4**). In **verse 2**, “As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim and burned incense to graven images,” the plural pronouns “they” or “them” probably refer to the prophets whom God used to call His “son,” Israel to return to Him. The main issue here is that beloved Israel is called out for being obstinate and wayward.

As noted above, God called or delivered Israel both spiritually and physically out of Egypt (**v. 2**). God’s main purpose for the Exodus was to

separate Israel from the worship of idols and to establish an intimate relationship with them. Several times, God instructs Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to “Let my people go, that they may serve (worship) me” (**Exodus 5:1, 8:1, 9:1, 10:1**). God recalls how the Israelites constantly rejected Him and followed other gods throughout their journey to the Promised Land. Instead of worshipping the Lord who showed them love, they wandered farther from Him; they followed Baal by sacrificing to it and “burning incense to graven images.”

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

### QUESTION 1

Who is the “they” in this passage?

### QUESTION 2

What does the hope of a Messiah (Jesus) offer to the future of the people of Israel?

## II. GOD’S AFFIRMING LOVE (Hosea 11:7–10)

God reminds the Israelites what happened to Admah and Zeboiim, who both perished with Sodom and Gomorrah, yet He refuses to allow that to happen to the people of Israel. God remains adamant in His refusal to destroy Israel by reaffirming love and not anger. Instead of God’s wrath (which would have been justified), He states that His “heart is turned within me, my repentings (compassion) are kindled” (**v. 8**). This is a reminder to the people of Israel of God’s divine position. We cannot place our definitions of human characteristics onto how we understand God’s behavior. God is infinitely larger than we could imagine, so when we note God’s love despite our disobedience, we cannot attempt to rationalize it with our human understanding. God believed in the return of faithful people (**vv. 10–11**).

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

In spite of God's tender love and care for Israel (vv. 3–4) and warning of exile to Assyria for refusing to repent (vv. 5–6), Israel (Ephraim) continues to rebel and reject God. The phrase “And my people are bent to backsliding from me” is a statement of disappointment by a father who loved his children. It points back to the efforts God made to keep the relationship between Him and His people alive. But the more He tried to make it work, the more they are habitually determined to walk away from Him. The word “backsliding” comes from the Hebrew noun, *meshubah* (mesh-oo-baw'), which means backturning or apostasy. This word comes from the root *shub* (Heb. SHOOV), which will be used positively in Hosea's next prophecy (see 12:6). God wants them to turn back to Him, but they are turning away from Him instead. The clause, “though they called them to the most High,” refers to the effort made (by the prophets) to turn Israel back to God, but they remain adamant—none of them would extol or honor Him.

**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.**

Like a spoiled child, Israel habitually turned away from God, deliberately dishonoring the Lord their God. Israel justifiably deserved the severest punishment possible, and God was obligated to fulfill that part of the covenant (**Deuteronomy 8:19–20**). Like a stubborn son who would not listen to his parents, Israel was totally rebellious toward God, their Father. According to Jewish law, a defiant son was supposed to be turned over to the elders of the city and stoned to death (**Deuteronomy 21:18–21**). An earthly father could give up his son. However, since God is

infinitely just and infinitely merciful, the two attributes are seemingly in conflict. Here mercy wins!

Rhetorically, as a father filled with love, compassion, and mercy, the Lord questions Israel. Here are two sets of parallelism, a feature common in Hebrew poetry. The first is “give thee up, Ephraim” with “deliver thee, Israel,” and the second is “make thee as Admah” with “set thee as Zeboim”; each refers to one action. “Ephraim” was the second son of Joseph, one of the northern tribes of Israel. Ephraim and Israel here represent the Northern Kingdom; it means that all the inhabitants of the northern tribes were guilty. There was a breakdown of discipline of the northern tribes; therefore, all deserved to be disciplined. To give them up or deliver them is tantamount to doing to them as was done to Admah and Zeboim—total destruction of the land and the people. Admah and Zeboim were among the five cities in the plain that included Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 14:2**), which were totally destroyed (**Genesis 18:16–19:20; Deuteronomy 29:22–23**).

Israel rightly deserved similar punishment. However, as He agonizes on this and envisions what the outcome would be, God's heart of compassion takes over. He says His heart has “turned” (Heb. *haphak*, haw-PHAK, to change or transform), meaning He has changed His mind. The phrase “my repentings are kindled together” expresses the intensity of His compassion. The word for “repentings” is elsewhere translated “comfort” and refers to mercy or compassion. The idea of being “kindled together” is also used to describe times of great emotional distress (**Genesis 43:30; 1 Kings 3:26**).

The questions He poses in **verse 8** are answered in **verse 9**. The Lord affirms, “I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim” (from v. 9). Here the Lord displays His characteristics of mercy and constancy. What seems like a change in God's action is in accordance with His eternal



purpose of love and mercy for His people. In addition to deep compassion, faithfulness to His unconditional covenant with Abraham (**Genesis 12:1–3**) motivated the Lord to spare Israel from total destruction. However, His covenant with Israel at Sinai was conditional. If they failed to meet those conditions, God was obligated to withhold His blessings. Israel's possession of land with its blessings was based on the Abrahamic Covenant, but their enjoyment was based on the Mosaic Covenant. God was faithful to both covenants: He preserved the nation, but He disciplined them for their sins. The phrase "the Holy One in the midst of thee" confirms His faithfulness and constant presence to protect and preserve them in keeping with His covenant. The phrase "I will not enter into the city" means that He would not enter the city as He did to Admah and Zeboim and destroy them in anger.

**10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.**

In the Scriptures, God's pronouncement of judgment is often immediately followed with a promise of hope. So it is in here with Hosea. He prophesies a better relationship between Israel and their God. They "shall walk after the LORD" means they will follow the ways of the Lord, in contrast to their former life of rebellion and obstinacy. Then the Lord "shall roar like a lion," not in the sense of hostility for destruction (**5:14; 13:7**), but as a signal and a call of returning from captivity: both physically from exile and spiritually from sin. They would come from the west including the islands and coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt. God calls people from everywhere to repentance.

### SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

#### QUESTION 3

Who were Admah and Zeboim and why does the Lord use them as an analogy?

#### QUESTION 4

How do we come to understand God's divine love through His relationship with the people of Israel?

### III. THE PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL

#### (Hosea 12:1–2)

At different times, Assyria and Egypt each conquered Israel and held their people captive, yet Israel still tries to make alliances and trade deals with them. Israel continues to use all forms of deceit and violence in pursuit of power. In many ways, these actions remain in direct conflict to the bondage that they were set free from as a people. Pursuit of their wishes and desires caused the people of Israel to fall. God at this moment is calling out Jacob and the people of Israel for their deceit and the deceit of his descendants who believed that their successes came from their works. God is now calling to bring a charge against the people of Israel; however, this charge is coming from His continued love for them.

**12:1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. 2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.**

Hosea continues God's charge against Ephraim (i.e., Israel) for their waywardness. Using the figure of speech of wind, Hosea describes Israel's pursuit of vain things and their false reliance on humans rather than their God. The phrase "Ephraim feedeth on wind" means to eagerly strive after empty or worthless things. The "wind" is *ruach* (**ROO'**-akh) in Hebrew, generally associated with air or breath and synonymous with emptiness. Not only do they pursue vain things, but they also followed "after the east wind." The east wind, used figuratively here, is particularly destructive to this area since it blows in from the desert bringing searing heat with it.

It represents not only the pursuit of vain things but the ruin Israel is bringing upon itself (cf. **Job 27:21**). How does Israel do this? They increase daily in “lies and desolation” and violence (see **Hosea 4:1–2**). Furthermore, they sought an alliance with worldly powers—Assyria and Egypt—hoping to secure help (**5:13**). Also, they made a treaty with Egypt against the Assyrians with oil. This historically happened under the reign of Hoshea; he rebelled against Assyria by covenanting with Egypt. But this backfired. This led to the destruction of Israel and its capture by Assyria (**2 Kings 17:3–6**).

**Verse 2** focuses on the sin of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Although their sin seemed less severe (**Hosea 11:12**), Judah was equally guilty and deserved discipline. The clause “The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah” means that the Lord has a charge against Judah. He “will punish Jacob according to his ways.” Jacob, who was later named Israel, was the ancestor of all 12 Tribes of Israel. Thus, the two kingdoms, here being represented by “Jacob” will be punished according to their deeds; none will go unpunished. **Verses 3–5** give a brief history of Jacob. Like his descendants, Jacob practiced deceit. But in contrast to Israel and Judah, Jacob sought God. Jacob rid his house of idols (**Genesis 35:2**), but his descendants could not give up their idol worship.

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

### QUESTION 5

What does the wind signify in this passage?

### QUESTION 6

Would it have been better to have the people of Israel destroyed to understand the seriousness of their actions?

## IV. SEEK GOD’S LOVE AND JUSTICE (**Hosea 12:6–14**)

God urges the people of Israel once again to return to the ways of love and justice. They must

put away the deceit and harm they have displayed since their release from Egypt. The boasting of riches and wealth is not rooted in justice or love, nor does it carry weight in God’s kingdom. God reminds the Israelites of the Festival of Booths, a time when they spend a week living in tents to honor God’s protection when they wandered the wilderness for 40 years. However, God warns the people of Israel that if they continue to live in such a way that glorifies material success and idol worship, they would be sent back to the tents and placed in bondage.

## **6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.**

After laying the charge against Judah and Israel, Hosea calls on them for a change of heart and direction. “Therefore,” he says, “turn thou to thy God.” The word “turn” is the Hebrew *shub* (**SHOOV**), which means to turn back, to retreat. It has the idea of changing a course or direction one was taking and turning to another. They have consistently wandered away from the God of their forefather Jacob, and now He wants them to turn back to Yahweh. To do that would mean to “keep mercy and judgment.” Mercy and justice are the very foundation of God’s principles. They are fundamentally required of all followers of God; they define a proper relationship with the Almighty (**Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8**). Jesus refers to these as “the weightier matters of the law” (**Matthew 23:23**). To do these, they must “wait on thy God continually.” This is a call to total surrender, hope, and reliance on God for strength. “Continually” has the idea of a consistent relationship with the Lord by keeping the precepts as children of the living God.

**7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. 8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.**



Here Hosea mentions some of the sins that the people of Israel had committed: using dishonesty in business (v. 7), defrauding people to make more money, and oppressing the people, expressed here as “deceit are in his hand.” Historically, Israel economically and materially prospered, and this led to their pride. They were so self-sufficient and delusional that they would say, “We don’t need God.” They thought that because of their wealth, they were righteous and sinless. This attitude that was common both in the eighth century BC and first century AD is still common today—not only in the world, but also in the Christian churches.

**9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast. 10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.**

But their pride and self-delusion will be debunked. The Lord would humble them. Here the Lord evokes His attribute of immutability with “the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt.” He recalls the history of the Exodus journey in the wilderness where they dwelt in tents. Instead of enjoying their houses, they would live in tents as their fathers did during their wilderness journey (**Hosea 13:4; Exodus 20:2**). After the Assyrians were done with them, Israel would be grateful even for the booths they lived in for a week during the Feast of Tabernacles (**Leviticus 23:33–43**). Customarily, once a year the Israelites would spend a week living in tents during the Feast of Tabernacles to commemorate God’s protection as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (**Deuteronomy 1:19–2:1**). In **verse 10**, the Lord warns that He has spoken through the prophets and with different methods, all types of visions and parables to communicate to them (**Hosea 6:5; Amos 2:11; Ezekiel 3:14**). Therefore, they cannot plead ignorance as a defense. Israel refused the admonitions but continued in their sin; therefore, the consequence of their sin will not be withheld.

**11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.**

**Verse 11** seems to confirm the degree and gravity of their sin of idolatry and abject rejection of the Lord. As an affirmation of their utter depravity, the prophet poses a rhetorical question: “Is there iniquity in Gilead?” He answers his question: “surely they are vanity.” Gilead was a region east of the Jordan known for its iniquity, vanity, idolatry, and wickedness. Gilgal, a major city just across in the Jordan from Gilead in Canaan, is referred to as a place of false worship (**Hosea 4:15**). Therefore, these places will be destroyed and their altars left as a heap of stones in the hollow of a plowed field.

**12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. 13 And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.**

With reference to Jacob’s plight, Hosea tells Israel to remember their humble beginnings: their prosperity was not by their personal effort, but because God was gracious to them. “Jacob fled into the country of Syria,” when he escaped from Esau to Padanaram (**Genesis 28:2, 5**). There he worked hard for His wealth. He served fourteen years, seven years for each of his two wives (**Genesis 29:20–28**) plus six more years to earn some of his father-in-law Laban’s sheep (**Genesis 30:31; 31:41**). Hosea also reminded them how the Lord delivered Israel by the hand of a prophet, Moses, out of Egypt and preserved them. As Jacob tended Laban’s wandering flock, so the Lord cared for Israel in the wilderness. Unlike during Moses’ leadership when he led the children and were preserved, present Israel has no regard for the prophets (**Hosea 4:5, 6:5, 9:7**).

**14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him.**

Despite warnings from the prophets, Israel was disobedient. They continued in their sin thereby aggravating the Lord's "anger most bitterly." Therefore, the Lord will leave them with their guilt of bloodshed (**Hosea 1:4, 4:2, 5:2, 6:8**). This also refers to violence they committed against others, including human sacrifices (**3:2**). The Lord gives up on them and will evoke justice. The clause "and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him" means the Lord will pay them with a taste of their own medicine. As in the Law of Moses, "their blood shall be upon them" (**Leviticus 20:11, 13, 16, 27**). Here is a contrast between past divine preservation and present divine anger that would bring punishment (**Isaiah 65:7**). Although God is merciful and compassionate, He is also a just God, and every sin has its consequences and must be atoned. Graciously, God does not deal with us according to our sins. Thanks be to God for sending His Son to atone for us through grace.

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

### QUESTION 7

God wants you to prosper and be in good health. He does not want you to be overtaken with the love of money and success. Why do you think the Lord abhors material gain being your central focus?

### QUESTION 8

How can one obtain wealth in a way that is still affirming of God's love and justice?.

## BIBLE APPLICATION

**AIM: Students will commit to acting justly, especially in the area of finances.**

There are individuals and corporations in this country who continue to profit from deceit and improper business practices. These individuals and corporations find themselves hoping to obtain worldly wealth and prosperity. Meanwhile, they continue to widen the wealth gap globally. Their desire to achieve power, status, and wealth by human means has allowed

them to lose sight of the destruction that they are causing to working class and poor people. In many ways God is still calling out to them, both in love and strong rebuke. God desires all His children, even those who operate in deceit and material wealth, to bring justice and restore good order. We can often find ourselves seeking to obtain material wealth while forgetting the reasons why God blesses us with wealth in the first place. We have been given wealth so that we may extend back the same love God has shown us, redistribute it among the least of these, and work toward restorative economic justice.

## STUDENTS' RESPONSES

**AIM: Students will seek God daily in every aspect of their lives.**

Always seek God daily in every aspect of your life. Ensure that you are keeping God at the head of your life (**Matthew 6:33**). Ask yourself, what are you faithful to? What do you find yourself idolizing? You can also examine if the blessings that God has provided you should be redistributed to those around you in need. Lastly, trust God to be the Provider in your life and not to trust in your own ability to provide.

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for placing Your love upon us. Forgive us for all our sins. Help us not to disobey Your Word and help us to return to being people filled with love. Fill us with your Holy Spirit as we seek to create a more just and equitable world for all people. We pray that Your mercy would abound evermore in our loves, and that we would constantly guard ourselves from the temptation to worship the gods of this world. Help us to be a people known for love, justice, and walking humbly with You. In the name of Jesus, amen.

## DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

In the Old Testament, the Lord commanded the people of Israel to give 10 percent of the



livestock they kept (**Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:26; Deuteronomy 14:23; 2 Chronicles 31:5**). The concept of tithing is just as important to Christians in the New Testament (**Luke 11:42; Matthew 23:23**), as it is in the Old Testament (**Malachi 3:10**). Our gifts and tithes are designed to keep the church functioning effectively. Jesus charges the Scribes and Pharisees not to be hypocrites. He tells them to both tithe and do justice. Today, Christians tithe less than they did before the Great Depression. Out of the 247 million self-identified Christians who live in the U.S., roughly 1.5 million actually tithe. Those whose annual salaries are less than \$20,000 are eight times more likely to tithe than those who make over \$75,000. At best only, 25 percent of each congregation actually tithe, but on average, only 3–5 percent of attendees tithe. While many people are shackled by massive financial debt, we as Christians are called to give a portion of what we earn to God, as everything belongs to Him. Tithing helps keep God at the center of our lives. Find out more at [Sharefaith.com](http://Sharefaith.com) by searching for “The Truth About Christians Tithing in the U.S.” under the heading “Magazine.”

**HOW TO SAY IT**

- Ephraim. EEF-ram.
- Assyria. ah-SEE-ree-ah.
- Admah. awd-MAH.
- Zeboim. zeh-boe-EEM.

**DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS**

**MONDAY**  
Receiving a New Vision of God  
(Genesis 28:10–17)

**TUESDAY**  
Justice for Gentile Believers  
(Acts 15:10–17)

**WEDNESDAY**  
The Up or Down Choice  
(Deuteronomy 28:1–6, 15–19)

**THURSDAY**  
Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt  
(Matthew 2:13–15)

**FRIDAY**  
Ephraim Spurns God’s Love and Suffers  
(Hosea 11:3–6)

**SATURDAY**  
Once a Slave; Now a Brother  
(Philemon 8–21)

**SUNDAY**  
Respond with Love and Justice Daily  
(Hosea 11:1–2, 7–10, 12:1–2, 6–14)

**PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY**

Read **Proverbs 1** and next week’s lesson, “The Call of Wisdom.”

**Sources:**  
 Biblesoft’s *New Strong’s Exhaustive Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. Biblesoft, Inc., 2006.  
 Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. 2006, Biblesoft, Inc.  
*NIV Life Application Study Bible*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2011.  
 “The Truth About Christians Tithing in the U.S.” Share Faith. Retrieved from <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2015/12/facts-christians-tithing/>.  
 Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament History*. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004.  
*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

**COMMENTS/NOTES**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---