

Hosea 11:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

Analysis

I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love (בְּחֶבְלֵי אָדָם אֲמַשְׁכֵם בְּעַבְתּוֹת)—Not harsh reins for beasts but gentle human persuasion and **bands of love** (אֲמַתָּה). God led Israel with kindness, not coercion. **I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws**—removing the yoke so the ox can eat freely; God lifted burdens and fed Israel tenderly. **I laid meat unto them**—paternal provision despite ingratitude. This verse answers the exodus question: God didn't drive Israel like cattle but wooed them with covenant love. Yet they 'refused to return' (v.5). The tragedy: divine tenderness spurned for Baal's empty promises.

Historical Context

Hosea contrasts God's gentle, loving treatment of Israel—"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love"—with how they would be driven into Assyrian exile with literal ropes and chains. This metaphor of God removing the yoke and providing food recalled the wilderness period (c. 1446-1406 BC) when God miraculously sustained Israel, contrasting with Hosea's contemporary situation where Israel had forgotten their benefactor. The 8th century northern kingdom attributed agricultural prosperity to Baal rather than YHWH, rejecting the God who had tenderly nurtured them. This verse's pathos—divine love spurned and covenant faithfulness unrequited—captures the tragedy of Israel's final generation before judgment.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Hosea 11:4 deepen your understanding of God's character, particularly His holiness, justice, and mercy?
2. What specific attitudes, thought patterns, or behaviors does this verse call you to examine and change in light of the gospel?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and His redemptive work, and how should that shape your worship and obedience?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵתִים אֶקְרֹב הַבְּעֵבֶת וְאֶחֱשָׁכֶם אֶדְם בְּחַבְלֵי					
them with cords	of a man	I drew	with bands	of love	H1961
H2256	H120	H4900	H5688	H160	
לְפָנָי כְּמַר יְמִינֵי עַל עַל לְחִיכָּמָן					
HO and I was to them as they that take off		the yoke	H5921	on their jaws	H3895
H7311		H5923			
אָזְקִיל: אֵל יְהָוָה					
H328	H413	meat			
		H398			

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 26:13 (Parallel theme): I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.

John 12:32 (Parallel theme): And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Isaiah 63:9 (Love): In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

2 Corinthians 5:14 (Love): For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

Hosea 2:8 (Parallel theme): For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

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