

The Word of the Lord to Hosea Lesson 5

Hosea 10:1 – 12:14

The Lord's first case against the people dealt with their disloyalty and refusal to recognize Him as their Maker. The second case focused on their harlotry as they turned their backs on Him. His mention of the detestable event against the man's concubine in Gibeah showed the extent of the nation's depravity. However, its sin actually began in Gilgal with their desire for an earthly king. By 741 BC, the Lord's patience with them neared its end, at least for that generation. His punishment would send them into exile in Assyria. From there, they would be scattered throughout the nations of the world. While the punishment seems harsh and may cause some to think that the Lord's actions constituted a breach of His promise, in the big picture of time, He used it as a step to spread the news of the Gospel of Christ in the three months following the marvelous day of Pentecost and the establishment of the Church. Those Jews who were scattered among the nations still made regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the high holy days. Hundreds of years later, the draw of Pentecost set the stage for over 3,000 men from all over the world to accept Jesus as their Lord on a single day after Peter delivered his 10-minute message. The Jewish converts returned to their homes over the next three months carrying the Gospel message, persuading others to become believers and establishing churches in their hometowns.³⁸ Continuing with the second case against the kingdom, Hosea prophesied the coming of Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria who was sent by the Lord to punish the Northern Kingdom and to fulfill the prophecy.

Hosea 10:¹ Israel is a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself. The more his fruit, the more altars he made; the richer his land, the better he made the *sacred* pillars.² Their heart is faithless; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars *and* destroy their *sacred* pillars.³ Surely now they will say, "We have no king, for we do not revere the Lord. As for the king, what can he do for us?"⁴ They speak *mere* words, with worthless oaths they make covenants; And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.⁵ The inhabitants of Samaria will fear for the calf of Beth-aven. Indeed, its people will mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests will cry out over it, over its glory, since it has departed from it.⁶ The thing itself will be carried to Assyria as tribute to King Jareb; Ephraim will be seized with shame and Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel.⁷ Samaria will be cut off *with* her king like a stick on the surface of the water.⁸ Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed; thorn and thistle will grow on their altars; Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"⁹ From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel; there they stand! Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity overtake them in Gibeah?¹⁰ When it is My desire, I will chastise them; And the peoples will be gathered against them When they are bound for their double guilt.¹¹ Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh, but I will come over her fair neck *with a yoke*; I will harness Ephraim, Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself.¹² Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you.¹³ You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, You have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,¹⁴ Therefore a tumult will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle, *when* mothers were dashed in pieces with *their* children.¹⁵ Thus it will be

³⁸ Acts 1 - 2

done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off.

This portion of the prophecy occurred between Shalmaneser's second and third invasions of the Northern Kingdom. The second invasion occurred in 741 BC and the third, led by Sargon, Shalmaneser's general, took place in 722 BC. The prophecy pictured Israel as a fruitful nation corrupted by her prosperity that included an element of idolatry which, in turn, threatened their covenant with God. The calf idolatry of Samaria grew and the Lord caused the Israelites to become servants of Assyria and King Jareb. Hosea presented the beautiful allegory that called for the people to plow up the old hard ground filled with idolatry and plant a new crop of righteousness. He warned them of the consequences of their past actions if they remained obstinate, not repenting or changing their ways.

In reality, Israel was an empty vine with no fruit. Why? She had abused the blessings of God through her adultery with idols and her prosperity only further corrupted her heart. She could not serve Jehovah and Baal. She should have destroyed her idols and altars; instead, God had to destroy them. By rejecting the true King, they were satisfied with any king, but no earthly king could save them; instead, he would go into exile with them. She was neither able to satisfy God nor avoid His displeasure. All her words were empty and deceitful. She continued to practice a false faith as she made alliances with foreign powers. The Lord's judgment upon her was like weeds and thorns and her society became a poison for her people. In fear, the people worshipped the calf at Bethel. When afraid, common people will try everything to survive even when they know it is against the will of God. When the end came, the people mourned the loss of their loved ones and their land as they were taken away into exile. King Manahem of Israel gave King Pul of Assyria a golden calf to stay his attack, but to no avail. With a puff of wind, the kings of Israel were cut off, the idol temples were torn down in Beth-aven and vegetation grew over the holy places, altars, and statues. Since the sin in Gibeah with the Levite's concubine, the Lord had been angry with Israel. He was angry only with Benjamin because the other tribes were innocent. However, they all eventually became guilty as observed through their actions. In the north, they bound themselves between two furrows, the calf altars at Dan and Bethel. Between them, the people were guilty of two evils; they forsook the Lord and embraced idols. Even though the kingdom of Ephraim knew better, it still intentionally broke the yoke of the Lord. Unmuzzled, the people could eat grain as they wished. The leaders who lived in the tribal area of Ephraim were not to graze where they wished. They were to plow the fields in a proper manner and care for the crops that so they would produce a good harvest. Instead, the kings, priests and prophets of Ephraim trod upon the crops, destroying them. The Lord warned Judah not to be involved with the Northern Kingdom. In the past, the north had sought help from the south but no longer did so. Judah should no longer plow the fields of the north. He should plow his own fields in righteousness. Judah was warned to fear the Lord and lead the people by seeking Him. If it does not follow, it too, will be unfruitful. The north had reaped its own sin, eaten the fruit of lies and forsaken the counsel of God. God had readied the enemy to strike all the fortified cities. Shalman, a shortened form of Shalmaneser, was ready to strike at Beth-arbel, a town situated in the tribal area nearest Assyria in Naphtali, Galilee. Beth-arbel's trouble was caused by the calf worship at Bethel.

The prophecy was fulfilled in 722 BC when King Hoshea was defeated just after dawn and the kingdom was secure in the Assyrian king's hands.

Hosea 11:¹ When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. ² The more they called them, the more they went from them; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. ³ Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I led them with

cords of a man, with bonds of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; and I bent down *and* fed them. ⁵ They will not return to the land of Egypt; but Assyria—he will be their king because they refused to return *to Me*. ⁶ The sword will whirl against their cities, and will demolish their gate bars and consume *them* because of their counsels. ⁷ So My people are bent on turning from Me. Though they call them to *the One* on high, none at all exalts *Him*.

The Lord had provided wonderful benefits for the Israelites, but they were ungrateful. In spite of His great love for them, the Lord had no choice but to administer punishment. The Lord did not suddenly come up with a new form of retribution. Before He allowed them to enter the Promised Land, the Lord had promised this same punishment if they broke His commandments. They had broken them; they had broken all of them. In their sin, the Northern Kingdom tried all possible human effort to survive, including a second alliance with Egypt.

2 Kings 17:4 ⁴ But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, who had sent messengers to So king of Egypt and had offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year; so the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

Bent on idolatry, the north prayed to the Most High while bowing before a man-made statue covered in gold or silver. Now all was lost. The time had come. The Lord commanded Assyria to attack. Although twenty years would elapse before the actual attack, the Lord had spoken and His Word was fulfilled in 722 BC.

The Case Expanded – Appeal Three

Hosea 11:⁸ How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. ⁹ I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. ¹⁰ They will walk after the Lord, He will roar like a lion; indeed He will roar and *His* sons will come trembling from the west. ¹¹ They will come trembling like birds from Egypt and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will settle them in their houses, declares the Lord.

In the midst of proclaiming the coming punishment, the Lord showed His continual desire to save them from their wicked ways. The questions, “How can I give you up ... how can I surrender you,” depicted the Lord’s struggle. That picture became clear with His mention of Admah and Zeboiim.

Deuteronomy 29:23 “All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and in His wrath.”

The Lord destroyed Admah and Zeboiim with Sodom and Gomorrah in His anger and wrath. The sin of the Northern Kingdom mirrored the sin of these four cities. Homosexuality, prostitution, harlotry and all other forms of illicit sexual relationships brought their existence to an end and the message of Hosea equated the sin of the Northern Kingdom to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Could the Lord do to them what He did to those cities? He could, but He would not. He would punish them; He would overthrow them, but He would not destroy them. To destroy them would show only His wrath and He had a greater plan. He saw the

future and the time when the descendants of the Northern Kingdom would turn to Him. As part of His plan, when He roars from Zion at the time of His Second Coming, they will return to the Promised Land from Egypt, Assyria and all the surrounding nations of the world just as He has promised in this passage.

Ephraim and Judah

Hosea 11:¹² Ephraim surrounds Me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit; Judah is also unruly against God, even against the Holy One who is faithful.

At the time of Hosea's message, Judah's sin hardly compared to that of Ephraim. Since 938 BC, Ephraim's sin germinated, grew, blossomed and then began to wither, while Judah continued to show faithfulness to the Lord. Only with the destruction of Israel did Judah's sin begin to germinate. This passage showed Ephraim's current state and prophesied Judah's future. Judah would see the punishment of the Lord too, in 606 BC.

Ephraim's Rebellion

Hosea 12:¹ Ephraim feeds on wind, and pursues the east wind continually; He multiplies lies and violence. Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.

Their feeding on the wind, a metaphor for vain, empty, useless, unproductive, worthless, hopeless and senseless efforts pictured Ephraim's outlook and resolve. The hot winds that came to them from the desert on the east side of the Jordan River brought nothing of value or comfort to the kingdom. The kings, priests and prophets led the people to trust in their vain, empty, useless, unproductive, worthless, hopeless, and senseless lies that piled up on each other, and then culminated in violence when their deception became apparent. The leaders lied when they promised help from Assyria and Egypt. With Assyria, they made a covenant; with Egypt, they tried to buy protection by sending them multiple barrels of olive oil. Neither nation could protect them from the Lord Whom they had forgotten and abandoned.

Jacob's Rebellion

Hosea 12:² The Lord also has a dispute with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; He will repay him according to his deeds. ³ In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his maturity he contended with God. ⁴ Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed; He wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel and there He spoke with us, ⁵ even the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is His name.

From his conception, Jacob, the father of all the 12 tribes, struggled with the world around him and with God. In the womb, he struggled with his brother, Esau. A liar throughout the majority of his life, Jacob conspired with his mother and stole his brother's birthright. At the age of 91, in 1914 BC, Jacob wrestled with the Lord all night. The next morning brought the dawn of a new man in Jacob, he was changed and godly. Later, in Bethel, where Abraham had built his first altar to the Lord, God changed Jacob's name to Israel. In Bethel, Jacob had built an altar to the Lord and consecrated it with oil. ³⁹ The Lord renewed His promise with the renamed nation and made it His. He made them His chosen people and provided for it through the next 1,192 years, but the fall of the Northern Kingdom marked the beginning of Judah's downfall. It, too, would need punishment for its deeds.

³⁹ Genesis 35:5-15

The Lord's Plea

Hosea 12:⁶ Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually. ⁷ A merchant, in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress.

This statement shows the character and desire of God; He never changes. His desire for the Northern Kingdom extended to the Southern Kingdom. We see that desire extended to the members of the Church today. The hope and salvation of everyone can still be found in the Lord's simple plea, "return to your God." The Northern Kingdom would not return to Him, would not observe His kindness and justice or wait for Him. In contrast, the merchant, better translated "A Canaanite," who controlled the land before Abraham arrived in 2090 BC, represented the corruption and ruthlessness of the original inhabitants of the land. By 741 BC, the Canaanite influence meant nothing because of Israel's dominance since the beginning of the conquest in 1405 BC. Therefore, the merchant reference stands as an indictment against the descendants of Jacob, now in control of the land, who delight in theft, lies and oppression of the people just as the Canaanites did.

Ephraim's Reply

Hosea 12:⁸ And Ephraim said, "Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; in all my labors they will find in me no iniquity, which *would be* sin."

Ephraim's reply showed no remorse; it showed the heightened state of his arrogance. Full of sin, he saw himself as sinless. Nevertheless, the Lord responded by recounting more of Jacob's story while laying the groundwork for Israel's future.

The Lord's Response

Hosea 12:⁹ But I *have been* the Lord your God since the land of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of the appointed festival. ¹⁰ I have also spoken to the prophets, and I gave numerous visions, and through the prophets I gave parables. ¹¹ Is there iniquity *in* Gilead? Surely they are worthless. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, yes, their altars are like the stone heaps beside the furrows of the field. ¹² Now Jacob fled to the land of Aram, and Israel worked for a wife, and for a wife he kept *sheep*. ¹³ But by a prophet the Lord brought Israel from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept. ¹⁴ Ephraim has provoked to bitter anger; so his Lord will leave his bloodguilt on him and bring back his reproach to him.

When the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt, they lived in tents for 40 years. The Israelites would soon leave the brick homes of their land to live in tents in Assyria. Why? They were guilty of refusing to heed the Lord's messages sent through the true prophets. By that time, Assyria controlled worthless Gilead on the eastside of the Jordan River. Gilgal would soon fall to the same fate. Had they forgotten Jacob's flight from Esau into Aram, modern day Syria, where he worked for his beloved Rachel for 14 years by keeping the sheep of her father and brother? Yes. Had they forgotten the prophet Moses, used by the Lord to bring them out of Egypt? Yes. Had they forgotten Joshua who led them safely in the conquest of the Promised Land? Yes. They had forgotten everything they should have remembered. The Lord's satisfaction for the sin of that generation would remain on their heads. Here, too, the Lord never changes. John recorded similar words in his Gospel.

John 3:36 ³⁶ "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 9:41 ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.