

## Lesson 4- Hosea 9 – 11: “Jehovah’s Controversy with Israel”

With Israel’s *national guilt* (chps.4-6) and *political corruption* (chps.7-8) clearly established, now Hosea lays bare the *religious apostasy* and its punishment which is forthcoming from Jehovah in chps.9-11.

### I. Israel’s *Religious Apostasy- Punishment is Coming*, chp.9

The prohibition of v.1 concerning “*rejoicing*” may have been in response to Israel’s temporary respite from the oppression of the Assyrians described in 2Kings 15:19-20. King Pul (a.k.a *Tiglath-Pileser III*, cf.1Chron.5:26) of the Assyrians is paid a tribute collected by Menahem from the wealthy nobles of Israel. Pul then returned to Assyria and the Israelites may have thought that they had escaped the destruction that had been prophesied by Hosea. But such was surely not the case. If these events are what is being described in v.1, then Israel is again charged with *playing the harlot* for seeking such an alliance with a foreign government rather than with God. This “*new wine*” (v.2) of Assyria would soon fail and Israel will be removed from “*the Lord’s land*,” v.3a. The “*return to Egypt*” is again a reference to the Egyptian *slavery* of Israel’s past that would become her future in Assyria, v.3b; cf. 11:5. The eating of “*unclean food*” (or “*bread*” in some translations) is *unclean* for anything outside of Israel’s land was thus considered.

Their newfound prosperity, gained by tribute to Assyria, could not be made acceptable to the Lord by making *libations* and *sacrifices* to Him, v.4. Instead, these *sacrifices* which they evidently attempted to offer would become as “*mourner’s bread*” defiling all who partook. *Mourner’s bread* is usually eaten in mourning for the dead so that all partakers *share grief* with the bereaved (cf. Jer.16:7). Here, the idea seems to be that what Israel would attempt to sacrifice to the Lord, in celebration of this treaty with Assyria, would in fact become a *feast of mourning* for their own destruction, cf. vv.5-6. *Memphis* was a chief-city of Egypt, which here is represented as becoming the burial ground for Israel and their opulent feasts.

Verses 7-9 present some difficulties with regard to interpretation. The first part of v.7 isn’t too tough. Despite Israel’s false hope, their *days of punishment* and *retribution* are here! And the last part concerning Israel’s *gross iniquity* and *great hostility* is likewise self-explanatory. But the middle portion of the verse dealing with the *prophet* and the *inspired man* is a bit more difficult to discern. It appears that these are referring to *false prophets* and those who *claim inspiration* that have predicted *ease in Zion* because of the treaty with Assyria. If this is correct, then God is obviously indicating that it is foolish to believe and trust such men, cf. Micah 2:11. Thus, the *blind* lead the *blind*.

In v.10, God says He “*found Israel like grapes in the wilderness... as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season.*” This is a testament of Israel’s early history, as also found in 10:1 and 11:1. The point is this: Israel’s faithfulness in her early days as a nation gladdened God heart as would fresh fruit found in a barren wasteland. But they had gone astray to idolatry and became, in keeping with the metaphor, as *detestable* as rotted fruit, v.10b. To God, they became as putrid as the idols that they loved.

Beginning in v.11 and going through v.14, Hosea uses the name “*Ephraim*” for another double-meaning analogy. The name means “*fruitfulness*” or “*double fruit*”. In this section the prophet says of Ephraim that “*their glory will fly away like a bird*”- quickly.

But note also the connection made between *glory* and the *barrenness* of Ephraim. In Hebrew culture, barren wives were despised and shameful whereas *fruitful* or fertile ones were a cause for *glory* both to themselves and their husbands. Here, Ephraim's former *glory*, or *fruitfulness* will fly away like a bird and leave only *barrenness*, *miscarrying wombs*, and *dry breasts*. She who had been the *glory* of her *spiritual husband* (God) would become shamefully *fruitless*.

V.15 begins with the emphatic statement, "*All their evil is at Gilgal; indeed I came to hate them there!*" Such begs the question; "What happened at Gilgal to bring about such condemnation of the place?" Gilgal was located northeast of Jerusalem in the Jordan valley. It previously had been the site of many of God's blessings upon Israel. It was where Israel had camped and eaten the first produce of *the Land* after coming up from Egypt. It was where the stones were erected to commemorate their crossing of the Jordan, cf. Josh.4:19-20. It was there that Saul was anointed king and later where the covenant with God of that appointment was renewed (cf. 1Sam.11:14-15). But as it had once been a place of prominent and positive significance to Israel, it had become a place of the vilest idolatry to God. Ephraim (the ruling tribe), again using a double meaning, had *multiplied* altars for sin there. Therefore, God says He would "*love them no more.*" This hearkens back to chp.1 where they are described as *Lo-ruhamah* (without mercy/compassion) and *Lo-ammi* (not My people). Thus Ephraim is "*stricken, their root is dried up, they will bear no fruit. Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb.*"

Hosea's assessment of these things is added in v.17, "*My God will cast them away because they have not listened to Him; and they will become wanderers among the nations.*"

## **II. Israel's Kings and Idols- Neither Able to Save Them, chp.10**

V.1 repeats the previously given analogy of Israel being a *productive vine*, cf.9:10. Here the *production* is purely selfish rather than *divine fruit* for God. Israel has taken God's blessing of them and utilized their prosperity to multiply their idols, and have thus multiplied their sin, cf. 2:5-8.

V.2 is admittedly difficult, and there seems to be a wide variety of opinions expressed regarding the meaning of the first phrase, "*Their heart is faithless*" as the NASB translates, or "*Their heart is divided*" as in the KJV, or "*false*" as in the ESV. This diversity arises from the differing ways in which the Hebrew word *halaq* can be defined and used. Basically, two of them come into play. The word is usually translated from either its first meaning, which is *to divide* (as in *to divide* or *assign* portions of plunder or land); or from its second, which is *smooth* (as in *smooth, slippery, deceitful, or flattering in speech*). So, translators and interpreters must choose which of these two meanings is intended. KJV and NKJV chose the first, *divided*, and conclude that Israel's heart is *divided* between Jehovah and idolatry. While such is certainly true (cf. 1Kings 18:21), it doesn't seem to fit in the context of 9:17 which has just said that they "*have not listened to Him*" (God). If they were not even really listening to God, why would their heart be thus "*divided*"? From the overall view of Hosea, it rather seems that Israel is *wholeheartedly* committed to idolatry, rather than split in allegiances between God and their idols! But if we consider the second, and less frequently used (perhaps in the prophets,

but not in the Psalms or Proverbs) meaning of *halaq* as “smooth” or *deceitful*, the phrase fits perfectly with the context. Israel’s heart is *smooth*, *deceitful*, and *false* because, as a “luxuriant vine,” they should have been bearing much fruit to Jehovah their God. But instead, Israel produces fruit only “for himself; the more his fruit, the more altars he made,” v.1. The *deceit* of Israel’s heart is further connected to the text by 6:1-4,6-7; 7:14-16. Also note Psalm 55:21 as representative of a number of passages in the writings of David and Solomon where *halaq* is used to refer to *smooth*, *deceitful*, or *flattering* speech. This definition also seems to tie in much better to the verses that follow as well.

In vv.3-10, Hosea says that God will destroy the products of Israel’s *deceitful heart*- their idols. But v.3 predicts a time when Israel would see their king removed and yet recognizes that even if he had not been, he would be able to do nothing for them, cf. v.7. This refers to Assyria’s taking of Samaria (the capitol) and all Israel in 722 B.C. Israel would then correctly associate their demise to their own lack of *reverence for the Lord*. The *words, oaths, covenants, and judgments* spoken of in v.4 refer to those of Israel’s kings and either: (1) the oaths they made to Jehovah concerning repentance, 6:1ff; or more likely (2) the alliances Israel had made with both Egypt and Assyria, cf.12:1; 7:11b, which they never intended to keep, 2Kings 17:3-18.

Note the predictions of destruction enumerated:

v.5, There will be *fear* and *lamentation* for the “*calf of Beth-haven*;”

v.6, It would be carried away to Assyria as a tribute (or ransom price) to the shame of Ephraim and Israel;

v.7, *Samaria*, Israel’s capital, would *float away* like a *stick carried away by currents* never to be seen again;

v.8a, Israel’s *monument to sin*, the “*high places of Aven* (formerly *Bethel*- house of God, now referred to as *Beth-aven*, or *Aven* as the *house of vanity*) will be destroyed and *thorns and thistles* will grow there, v.8a.

What would Israel’s reaction be to such? The last part of v.8 gives us insight when it predicts that they would say to the mountains and hills, “*Cover us*” and “*Fall on us!*”

In vv.9-10, *Gibeah* is again interjected, cf. 9:9. The text of the NASV says “*From the days of Gibeah*” Israel had sinned. Perhaps this is the best translation, but the marginal reading of the ASV renders the phrase as “*more than in the days of Gibeah*” which may be better. Either way, it is important to realize that in *Gibeah*, the sinners were punished almost immediately and nearly to extinction, cf. Judges 19-20. Here, with Ephraim, they have been allowed by God to continue until it *is His desire* (v.10a) to *chastise* and *overtake them* (v.9b). Scholars are divided as to what Ephraim’s “*double guilt*” might be. Some suggest that it refers to the two calves at Dan and Bethel. Others think that it is a reference to Israel’s turning *from God* and *to idols*. Perhaps it was their *rejection of God as their King* in 1Sam.8 and their rejection of *God as their God* when they turned to idols, cf. v.13b- “*because you have trusted in your way.*”

Beginning in v.11 and running through v.15, Hosea returns to agricultural examples to illustrate Ephraim’s sin, v.11a; what will happen to them, v.11b; and what they should do to prevent such, v.12. In v.13, the prophet accuses Israel of having *cultivated*

wickedness and reaped injustice. Because of this, they would harvest *tumult* and *destruction* when “*Shalman*” (probably “Shalmaneser V” of Assyria who followed Tiglathpileser, cf. 2Kings17:3-6) *completely cuts off the king of Israel*, v.15.

### III. Israel Apostatized in Spite of God’s Love & Care, chp.11

In Israel’s early history, as they are described in v.1 as “*a youth*,” God loved and *called them* from out of Egypt (slavery/bondage). In Matt.2:15, this verse is quoted and applied to the life of Jesus. But here it obviously refers to God’s deliverance of them that was motivated by tremendous love.

In v.2, some manuscripts use the pronoun “*they*” and some utilize “*He*” when speaking of the one(s) doing the *calling* and from whom Israel went. Either could be correct. If “*He*” is preferred, then the antecedent would be “God” Himself. If “*they*” is correct, then it would refer to *the prophets* sent by God to Israel whom He loved and desired to correct. As a *Father* lamenting over the sins of His son, God remembers and reminds them that it was He who nurtured, loved, and healed them, whether they knew or acknowledged it or not, vv.3-4!

Although “Egypt” has been repeatedly given as a destination for Israel because of their sins, in v.5 it is made abundantly clear that such was only in a figurative sense of captivity, cf. 8:13; 9:3,6. “*Assyria*” is specified as the *physical*, or *geographic* place of their captivity. Several reasons are given in these few verses to again *show cause* for Israel’s punishment. Note:

v.5b, “*because they refused to return to Me*”

v.6b, “*because of their counsels*”

v.7a, because “*My people are bent on turning from Me*”

v.7b, because “*None at all exalts Him*” v.7b.

In vv.8-11 we see the deep lament of this *heavenly Father/Husband* for His *children/wife* when He asks, “*How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel?*” The references in v.8 to *Admah* and *Zeboiim* is made clear by Gen.14:8ff and Deut.29:23 where these cities are connected to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The meaning here in v.8 is closely connected to the previous questions. God is asking *How could He make Ephraim and Israel a desolation* as He had done to *these cities of the plain*? An indication of the coming answer of God to all of these questions is given in the next two phrases of the text: “*My heart is turned over within Me*” and “*All my compassions are kindled.*” Despite Ephraim’s (and Israel’s) flagrant apostasy, God would not allow Himself to react to man’s treachery *in the way of man*. He was God! Therefore, v.9 shows the mercy and forgiveness of God upon an undeserving people! Why the change? Throughout the book, the surety of destruction has been consistently preached! Why is He relenting now? Notice carefully v.10 for the answer, “*They will walk after the Lord, He will roar like a lion...and His sons will come trembling from the west*” v.10. When a remnant of Israel turned to follow again the Lord, He would show mercy and again “*settle them in their houses,*” v.11.

How do we correlate this prophecy to history since Israel was indeed “no more” after going into Assyrian captivity? Since the next verse (v.12) again picks up with the

previous thoughts of Ephraim and Israel's *lies* and *deceits*, it seems that this "relenting" of God and "repentance" of Israel refers prophetically to a restoration under and through the Messiah. As most of the prophets do, Hosea gives a glimmer of hope to shine through the dark cloud of destruction- that *glimmer of hope* is of course, Jesus the Christ!

Since v.12 seems more closely connected to chp.12 than chp.11, we will consider it along with chp.12 in the next section.

## Lesson 4 Study Questions, Hosea 9 – 11

### Chapter 9

1. Given what has so far been prophesied concerning Israel, why is the prohibition “*Do not rejoice*” necessary? (cf. 2Kings 15:19-20)
2. What is “*mourners’ bread*,” v.4 (cf. Jer.16:7), and why would it be “*for themselves (Israel) alone*”?
3. Why does v.6 specify “*Egypt*” and “*Memphis*,” a chief city of Egypt, since Assyria is clearly their destroyer, cf. 11:5?
4. Note the *verb tense change* from v.6 to v.7. What does this signify?
5. V.9 references “*as in the days of Gibeah*” (cf. Jud.19 - 20). How and why is this relevant to Israel in Hosea’s time?
6. Likewise, v.10 mentions “*Baal-peor*” (cf. Num.25:1-9). How and why is this relevant to Israel in Hosea’s time?
7. And finally, v.15 cites “*Gilgal*” (cf. Josh.4:19-20; 5:9; 1Sam.11:14-15). How and why is this relevant to Israel in Hosea’s time?

### Chapter 10

8. How did Israel utilize the “productivity” of his *vine, fruit, and land*?
9. But in v.2, what would they *bear*; what will happen to their *altars* and *sacred pillars*; and *why*?

10. V.3 predicts a time when Israel had “*no king*” and realize the reason for it. When and why would this happen?
11. Instead of *mourning* for their sins against God and the coming destruction of their nation, what does v.5 say they would *mourn* and *cry over*? Why?
12. When the “*high places of Aven*” would be destroyed, what would Israel then say?
13. V.9 says that “*From the days Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel;*” what happened at *Gibeah* (cf. Judges 19 -20), and why is it referenced here?
14. How should Israel have *sown*, *reaped*, and *plowed* (v.12) versus how did they *plow*, *reap*, and *eat* (v.13); and *why*?

### **Chapter 11**

15. V.1 is quoted in Matt.2:15. What is its application there? What is the meaning here within the context of Hosea?
16. Early in the book, God is represented by Hosea and Israel by Gomer. What is the comparison depicted in vv.3-4?
17. Vv.5-7 lists the *reasons* that Israel would “*not return to the land of Egypt; but Assyria...*” What are those *reasons*? (at least 4)
18. Vv.8-11 manifest the deep lament of God toward *Ephraim/Israel*. To what *cities* are they compared, and why? (see Gen.14:8ff and Deut.29:23 for help)
19. When and how would the *glimmer of hope* prophecies of vv.9-11 come to pass?