

Lesson 5- Hosea 12 – 14: “Israel’s Apostasy & God’s Fidelity”

I. Comparisons to Jacob, chp.12

As stated at the end of the previous section, 11:12 seems to “fit” much better contextually in/with chp.12 than it does in chp.11, so it will be covered here. In fact, the Hebrew Bible has the verse as the first one of this chapter. It begins the contrast of the **unfaithfulness** of both Israel and Judah with the constant **faithfulness** of God. The *lies, deceit, and unruliness* is perpetrated against the *loving constancy* of the *Holy One*.

God accuses Ephraim directly for his *multiple lies*- that of making covenants he did not intend to keep with Assyria (perhaps the “*east wind*” since Assyria is geographically east and north of Israel) and at the same time taking gifts of treaty or tribute to Egypt, v.1. “*Judah*,” though not included in the rebuke of v.1, gets its own indictment in v.2. These things seem to relate to the events recorded in 2Kings 17:3-4. Also in v.2, the Lord turns His attention next to “*Jacob*.” This seems to be a designation intended to include both Israel (northern ten tribes) and Judah (the two southern tribes). This inclusion of both sections of Israel into one is significant for a couple of reasons: 1) God has previously dealt with them separately; and, 2) “*Jacob*” changes from *Judah* to the patriarch himself in the next verses.

Beginning in v.3 and running through v.4, “*Jacob*” refers to neither of the divisions of Israel, but to the patriarchal ancestor of them both as an example. But of what is Jacob being given as an example? Note carefully the specifics of Jacob’s life that are listed in the verses:

- He held onto Esau’s feet in birth, Gen.25:23-26;
- He had a greater desire of and traded for the birthright, cf. Gen.25:27-34;
- He had a greater desire for and tricked his father out of the blessing as well, Gen.27:5-29;
- His name was changed to “*Israel*” after he wrestled with the angel at the ford of Jabbok, Gen.32:22-30; and,
- He sought with tears the Lord’s favor at Bethel where the Abrahamic covenant was renewed and where he built an altar to Jehovah as *his* God, Gen.35:1-15.

But what are these examples supposed to prove? What point is God making to “*Jacob*” of Hosea’s time? The answer is not difficult, but care must be taken. We typically see the mistakes, trickery, and treachery of Jacob’s life. Though some of that is part and partial to these examples, that is not why they are being here utilized. **Jacob’s desire is being emphasized.** Certainly, he used less than admirable means (which are not condoned), but his *desire* for what he perceived to be important seems to be the point of the examples (cf. Luke 16:1-9 where much the same point is made in the parable of *The Unjust Steward* by Jesus). Jacob *wanted* his father’s birthright and blessing initially, and God’s blessing and birthright eventually. If only “*Jacob*” of Hosea’s time had such desires for their *ancestral birthright* and *blessing* from their spiritual Father, Jehovah! The power of Jacob *the patriarch* to prevail was and had been always available to Jacob *the nation of Israel* if they had only utilized it, vv.5-6. But they, like

Canaanite (marginal) *merchants*, had instead turned to the idols of *false balances* and the *oppressions* of foreign alliances, v.7. Surely they had forgotten God, which Jacob *the patriarch* never did, and had deceived themselves into thinking that it was their own power and might which had produced their prosperity, v.8. Contrastingly, Jacob *the patriarch* gave glory to God for his wealth, Gen.31:7,9,36-42. Hence, the *Jacob of the day* should heed the example of *Jacob of old!*

In the latter part of v.8, Ephraim is quoted as saying, “*In all my labors they will find in me no iniquity, which would be sin.*” V.9 begins with contrasting conjunction “*But...*” and God responds to their blatant hypocrisy. He says that He had been *their God* since Egypt- in effect saying that He knew better than to believe their boast! In fact, He would “*make you live in tents again!*” As further evidence of that which they sought to deny, He reminds them of the numerous *prophets, visions, and parables* He had sent to correct them, v.10. In v.11 the sarcasm is obvious when He asks, “*Is there iniquity in Gilead?*” *Gilead* has been previously cited as an example of Israel’s wickedness *east of the Jordan* (cf. 6:8), and now *Gilgal* is being added in a similar way as representative of the sins of Israel *west of the Jordan*. Her altars would be as *stone heaps* beside the furrows in the field- numerous, useless, forsaken, and desolate.

Vv.12-14 makes a comparison between “*Jacob/Israel*” *the patriarch* and “*Jacob/Israel*” *the nation*. Jacob *the patriarch* had fled to Aram (Haran, cf. Gen.28:10; 29:4) and there had worked as a slave to his uncle Laban for seven years (14 in all through Laban’s deceit) for the hand of Rachel. Contrastingly, Israel had been freed from Egyptian slavery by God through the prophet Moses and brought to a bountiful land for which they had not worked at all. Jacob struggled without complaint for that which he eventually received, saw God’s providence in it, and subsequently gave God the glory for it. Israel had been graciously given a land by God for which they had done nothing and had complained to, murmured against, and eventually forsook Him. **What a contrast between the two *Jacobs/Israels!***

II. Israel’s Destruction Caused by Rebellion, chp.13

Again, at the beginning of this chapter, Ephraim’s glorious past is brought forth as an example. Previously, Ephraim (Israel’s kings/ruling class) was respected and even feared both *internally* by their own people and *externally* by the nations around him. But, because of his idolatrous affinity for and allegiance to Baal, his *death warrant* was signed, v.1. Lust for this idolatry led him to “*kiss the calves*” of Baal, v.2. Therefore, v.3 concludes, he would become like:

- *the morning cloud and dew which soon disappears;*
- *chaff blown from the threshing floor; and,*
- *smoke quickly dissipated from the chimney;*

All of which emphasizes the transient nature of his very existence. Ephraim will be visible only a little while longer.

In vv.4-6a, God again contrasts *His own loving and providential care for Israel* with their *unfaithfulness toward Him*. He had:

- been their God and Savior since Egypt (their *Father* who *begot* them *nation*);

- cared for them in the wilderness (their *Nurturer*);
- provided for them during drought (their *Sustainer*); and,
- *pastured* them and their livestock (their *Shepherd*).

And yet after growing *fat* on the protections and provisions given by God, they became *satisfied, proud* (in a *negative way*), and *forgot Him*, v.6b.

So, God says He would turn from *Provider* to **Punisher**. He compares Himself to *a lion, a leopard, a bear, a lioness, and a wild beast that will tear them*, vv.7-8.

The sad reality of Israel's plight was that they had *turned against* the only One who had the power to help them, v.9. Next, God reminds them from where much of their problem had arisen- their own desires to have a *king* rule over them rather than the *judges* God repeatedly used to deliver them previously. The *king* had been reluctantly given them by God to *teach them a lesson*, and now that lesson would be fully learned, vv.10-11. From Jeroboam to Hoshea (first to last), Israel's kings had not a true worshipper of God among them. Their *cup of iniquity* was now full and ready to overflow in the pouring out of God's vengeful wrath.

Yet another metaphor is introduced in vv.12ff to highlight the dire situation of Ephraim. His sin is *bound up/stored up* as a *child waiting in the womb to be born*. While similar imagery is used in positive ways in the N.T. to depict the *new birth* by the gospel (cf. John 3:3-5 and Jas.1:18,21), here the picture is one of travail and doom. In this illustration, the woman is not able to perform the delivery. As everyone knows, this situation is very hazardous to both the mother and the child, and cannot be tolerated long without the death of both. Here is Ephraim's situation. From this dire circumstance, God will *ransom from Sheol* and *redeem from death* a new nation. Ephraim will indeed go into the graphic *travails* in Assyria listed in vv.15-16, yet God will redeem them- not physically, but spiritually. The physical nation of Israel would be destroyed completely in Assyria, cf. vv.15-16, but a new *spiritual nation* would emerge as a phoenix from its ashes- a *spiritual Israel* which is again "*of God*," cf. Gal.6:16; Rom.9:6-13; and 2:28-29. From the death of Israel, life would be resurrected, cf. Ezekiel 37!

III. The Final Appeal for Repentance, chp.14

In this the last chapter, a final appeal is made for Israel to repent and *return to the Lord your God*, v.1. Despite the surety of their demise, Hosea urges them to bring *true words of repentance* (as compared to their previous *false words of repentance*, cf. 6:1-6; and 7:14), v.2. In this repentance *confession* will also be required- a confession that neither *Assyria* nor their own *horses* (cavalry) could indeed save them from destruction brought about by God's vengeance. The confession should also include a vow to never again say "*our god*" to anything that they themselves had made, v.3. The last phrase of v.3 is also a significant part of the confession urged by Hosea- that "*in Thee the orphan finds mercy*." This is admission of guilt in that they had indeed become that which God said they were in 1:9.... "**not My people!**"

Should Ephraim respond to Hosea's message by confession and repentance, God will tenderly answer *in kind* by: (v.4)

- *Healing their apostasy* as terrible disease from which He cleanses them;
- *Loving them freely* again as their Father; and
- *Turning away His anger* which has (or in this case, *will*) punish them by the hands of Assyria.

In v.5, a couple of similes are utilized to describe the benefits of Israel's *return to favor* with Lord attained by their confession and repentance. God will be "*like dew*" which will allow them to "*blossom like the lily*". This return of God's blessing upon them would also allow them to return to a position of strength in the region. Israel would then "*take root like the cedars of Lebanon*" and become beautiful and productive "*like the olive tree*," v.6. So overwhelming would be the favor bestowed upon Israel that the surrounding nations would be profited and again *take note* of them, v.7.

All of these blessings are predicated upon Ephraim's determination to abandon their idolatrous ways and return to Jehovah, v.8. Then God would again take on the *fatherly role* of provision for, protection of, and production through, Israel.

V.9 stands as an epilogue of the whole book. It summarizes the purpose and message of Jehovah God through Hosea, His prophet. It is very much akin to "*The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom*" as found in Proverbs 9:10. Israel will again be *wise* and *blessed* if they will heed God's call to repentance through Hosea. They have sinned repeatedly and bitterly toward God and must be punished for it. But a better day of blessing will come.

IV. Conclusion

Hosea, likely more than any prophet sent to Israel before him, has come to see things from God's perspective. By his own experiences with Gomer, he has come to *feel* as *God feels* for Israel. This experience has led him to make a passionate plea for Israel to repent and return. Israel has become *drunk with idolatry* and will be made *sick* through the punishment of Assyria. God has *sent her away* (divorced), declared that His *compassion* and *love* for her has come to an end (cf. 1:6; 9:15b), and *disowned* them (1:9). Lamentably, *physical* Israel did not heed the message of Hosea. But the *favor* of the Lord was and is lavished upon *spiritual* Israel which rose like a Phoenix from its predecessor's ashes through Jesus Christ. These things Hosea saw very clearly.... and writes very vividly. **The lesson(s) remain true today for us to heed and obey, or dismiss and despise.**

Lesson 5 Study Questions, Hosea 12 – 14

Chapter 12

1. Hosea is primarily directed to *Israel* (northern ten tribes), but 11:12 speaks of *Ephraim, the house of Israel, and Judah* together. Why, and what two things are being contrasted?
2. To whom does “*Jacob*” refer in v.2? To whom does “*Jacob*” refer in vv.3-5? What is the point of the comparison (including v.6)?
3. What is *Ephraim’s* perspective of itself in v.8? What is *God’s* assessment of them from vv.1,7?
4. What are God’s points in vv.9-10? (at least 3, please)
5. Please explain the purpose of the comparison between *Jacob/Israel/he* in v.12 and *the Lord and a prophet* in v.13.

Chapter 13

6. From v.1: a) Are *Ephraim* and *Israel* being used synonymously or distinctively? b) If the latter, what does each represent? c) Identify the *digression* of *Ephraim* through the verse from beginning to end.
7. Because of their *idolatry* (v.2), Ephraim would become *like* what in v.3? What trait do these images have in common?

8. Ephraim (and Israel's) *unfaithfulness* is contrasted with God's *faithfulness* in vv.4-5. In what ways was He *faithful* to them?

9. Again, as in #1c, identify the *digression* of Ephraim/Israel in v.6.

10. From vv.7-8, what does God say He will become to Israel (5), and why?

11. Explain vv.12-13.

12. How will God *ransom from Sheol* and *redeem from death* Ephraim (v.14) given the "sentence" pronounced in v.16?

Chapter 14

13. From vv.1-3, what "*words*" are Israel to *take with them* when they are urged to "*return the Lord*"? Why are these particular *words* important?

14. When did the Lord fulfill the *promises* of vv.4-7 toward Israel?

15. How does v.8 summarize the whole book of Hosea?

16. How is v.9 a message to all who read Hosea?