



## Hosea - Chapter Ten

### II. Hosea 4:1-14:9 - Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Ten

The comparisons of Israel continue. This time they are described as a luxuriant vine that bears much fruit for they believe themselves to be a prosperous nation, and as a trained heifer that was free to work the land but wandered off, worshipping their golden calves and living like the other nations. They have forsaken God and will face judgement accordingly for their wickedness.

#### II.h Hosea 10:1-15 - Israel's Sin and Captivity

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- <sup>1</sup> Israel is a luxuriant vine  
that yields its fruit.  
The more his fruit increased  
the more altars he built;  
as his country improved,  
he improved his pillars.
- <sup>2</sup> Their heart is false;  
now they must bear their guilt.  
The Lord will break down their altars,  
and destroy their pillars.

## Hosea 10:1-2

Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. This example suits Hosea's repeated pattern that Israel got off to a good start but then went wrong. The vine's fruit increased, and the country improved. However, the more Israel prospered, the more Israel sinned. For the image of Israel as a vine refer to Psalm 80:8-16, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-8 and 17:1-10.

The more altars he built; he improved his pillars. It was just as Moses had warned in Deuteronomy 8:11-14. God blessed Israel with material abundance, but they spent it on themselves and their own idolatrous desires, i.e. the more altars he built. Israel enjoyed the blessing of God, but used those blessings in ungodly ways. Abundance is risky; God's people could not handle it: <<*Two things I ask of you; do not deny them to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God*>> (Proverbs 30:7-9).

**Paul warns against the same sin:** <<*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another*>> (Galatians 5:13). **Sometimes Christians take the liberty and blessing God gives and use them in ungodly ways.**

Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. Because Israel has received blessing, they were more responsible than ever to use it wisely. Because they used God's bounty in wicked ways, God will break down their altars to pagan gods and ruin their sacred pillars made unto idols.

The word false is also translated as **divided**, Hebrew *halaq*, which has the ideas of 'divided' (Genesis 14:15 and 49:7), of 'smooth' (Genesis 27:11 and Psalm 55:21), or of 'flattering' (Psalm 5:9 and 36:2). So, it may be accurate to translate this phrase as their heart is false or divided, but it may also be that God wants to say that Ephraim has a smooth, flattering, insincere heart. The idea of Israel's smooth or insincere heart is reflected by the adulteries of Hosea's wife Gomer earlier in the book. In the same way that an unfaithful spouse will say they love their partner, all the while living a lie, is the same way Israel's heart was towards God. Israel had this divided, insincere heart and expressed it on the altars of idolatry. Now, he will break down their altars.

- <sup>3</sup> For now they will say:  
'We have no king,  
for we do not fear the Lord,  
and a king – what could he do for us?'

### Hosea 10:3

We have no king. The prophet either foretells the end of the northern monarchy due to the people's unfaithfulness, or he is referring to the fact that they have again rejected God as their King due to their idolatry: <<*But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses*>> (1 Samuel 10:19a). Under the judgement of the Lord, foreign powers dominated Israel so they no longer had their own king. Even the idols they honoured and trusted so much will be taken away to foreign lands as treasure for foreign kings.

- <sup>4</sup> They utter mere words;  
with empty oaths they make covenants;  
so litigation springs up like poisonous weeds  
in the furrows of the field.

### Hosea 10:4

It is difficult to determine whether those who utter mere words are Israelites (v.3) or their kings. If Israelites, it refers to Israel's misplaced reliance on their leaders and the hypocritical or blind claim that they are nevertheless faithful to the Lord: <<*and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them*>> (1 Samuel 8:7), and: <<*They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds; they gash themselves for grain and wine; they rebel against me*>> (Hosea 7:14). If it refers to the words of kings, their covenants/promises do not stem from integrity but are untrustworthy, empty oaths.

- <sup>5</sup> The inhabitants of Samaria tremble  
for the calf of Beth-aven.  
Its people shall mourn for it,  
and its idolatrous priests shall wail over it,  
over its glory that has departed from it.

### Hosea 10:5

The address moves to the future. The inhabitants of Samaria tremble. Both their king and calf-idol will be removed from Samaria. What the people and the priests once rejoiced over, they will mourn for.

The calf of Beth-aven, Beth-aven, referred to as Aven in v.8, means 'house of evil' or 'house of deceit'; here it serves as a pejorative name for Bethel (v.15 and

Hosea 12:4), which means ‘house of God’ as it was named by Jacob following his dream of heaven; refer to Genesis 28:19. It was the site of one of the two golden calves that King Jeroboam had set up as worship idols in the northern kingdom: <<*But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit – the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan*>> (2 Kings 10:29).

The term glory describes the special presence of God in his sanctuary: <<*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*>> (Exodus 40:34), and: <<*When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple*>> (2 Chronicles 7:1). Here it is the presumed presence of God at the illegitimate sanctuary. It will depart, i.e. go into exile, just as the legitimate glory did: <<*She named the child Ihabod, meaning, ‘The glory has departed from Israel’, because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, ‘The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured’*>> (1 Samuel 4:21-22).

- <sup>6</sup> The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria  
as tribute to the great king.  
Ephraim shall be put to shame,  
and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

#### Hosea 10:6

The idol they worshiped becomes tribute for the great king of Assyria, probably Tiglath-pileser III: <<*When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound*>> (Hosea 5:13).

- <sup>7</sup> Samaria’s king shall perish  
like a splinter on the face of the waters.

#### Hosea 10:7

The imagery like a twig or a splinter on the face of the waters, i.e. one tossed about every which way and then swept away, illustrates the helplessness and weakness of the kings that Israel trusted. It is a condition that can fall upon those who do not hold fast to the true Word of God: <<*Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?*>> (Amos 8:8), <<*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful*

*scheming*>> (Ephesians 4:14), <<*But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*>> (James 1:6).

- <sup>8</sup> The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,  
shall be destroyed.  
Thorn and thistle shall grow up  
on their altars.  
They shall say to the mountains, Cover us,  
and to the hills, Fall on us.

### Hosea 10:8

For Aven, another name for Beth-aven, refer to the comments made on Hosea 4:15 and v.5 above.

The thorn and thistle indicate that the land is unproductive: <<*And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it", cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field*>> (Genesis 3:17-18), <<*You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?*>> (Matthew 7:16), <<*But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over*>> (Hebrews 6:8). After the desolation of exile, the once-busy pagan altars of Israel are now overgrown with thorns and thistles. This is the result of Israel's rejection of the Lord and embrace of pagan gods.

- <sup>9</sup> Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel;  
there they have continued.  
Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah?

### Hosea 10:9

Since the days of Gibeah. Gibeah was already mentioned in Hosea 9:9, recalling the horrific sin described in Judges Chapter 19. Even though there was a battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity, there was still iniquity in Israel. Here, God wants a wilfully blind Israel to see their sin and repent of it. The idea is that if disaster overtook the Benjaminites at Gibeah, how much more is Israel now in trouble.

10 I will come against the wayward people to punish them;  
and nations shall be gathered against them  
when they are punished for their double iniquity.

### Hosea 10:10

I will come against the wayward people to punish them. Like unruly farm animals, God will control and guide Israel and Jacob, even if they kick against him: <<*When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads”*>> (Acts 26:14). While the primary source of Israel’s discipline and downfall is the Lord himself, the agency of discipline will be through the nations shall be gathered against them: <<*Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger – the club in their hands is my fury!*>> (Isaiah 10:5). OT prophets frequently linked the first cause, the Lord, with secondary causes, in this case the nations.

11 Ephraim was a trained heifer  
that loved to thresh,  
and I spared her fair neck;  
but I will make Ephraim break the ground;  
Judah must plough;  
Jacob must harrow for himself.

12 Sow for yourselves righteousness;  
reap steadfast love;  
break up your fallow ground;  
for it is time to seek the Lord,  
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

13 You have ploughed wickedness,  
you have reaped injustice,  
you have eaten the fruit of lies.  
Because you have trusted in your power  
and in the multitude of your warriors,

14 therefore the tumult of war shall rise against your people,  
and all your fortresses shall be destroyed,

as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle  
when mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.

<sup>15</sup> Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,  
because of your great wickedness.

At dawn the king of Israel  
shall be utterly cut off.

### Hosea 10:11-15

The passage is punctuated with agrarian images, again alluding to the issue of fertility. Ephraim was a trained heifer is another allusion to Israel's beginnings. The Lord spared Israel the yoke; they loved to thresh in his field: <<***You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain***>> (Deuteronomy 25:4). However, that freedom was abused: You have ploughed wickedness, you have reaped injustice. Therefore, the Lord must harness Ephraim. The idea here is in concert with Hosea restraining his wife, so that Israel would sow the seeds of righteousness and plough and reap a crop of steadfast love: <<***For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads, it shall yield no meal; if it were to yield, foreigners would devour it***>> (Hosea 8:7). A deaf ear to the prophet's appeals will translate into a military disaster: <<***The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their fortresses; they shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall stand in fear of you***>> (Micah 7:16-17).

God builds on the picture of sowing and reaping by telling Israel to break up your fallow ground, ground that has not been ploughed for more than a year. It is ground that is hard and stubborn, resistant to the seed. It does little good to sow seed on fallow ground; it must be broken up first: <<***For thus says the Lord to the people of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns***>> (Jeremiah 4:3). Sometimes when the Word of God goes forth and seems to have little effect, it is because it falls on fallow ground, the hard ground that will not allow the seed of the Word to penetrate and become fruitful. Since fallow ground is hard, it probably does not want to be broken up. It is hard and compact, and the blade of the plough hurts as it cuts through. If the fallow ground could talk, it would probably cry out when it is ploughed. Yet it is useless as ground as long as it is fallow.

For it is time to seek the Lord is a reminder of how we break up the fallow ground. It is achieved by seeking the Lord, not self or idols; for it is time shows that the time to break up the fallow ground is now.

That he may come and rain righteousness upon you. This reveals the time to break up the fallow ground and sow the seed of righteousness. It needs to be done until the harvest comes. God's use of the figures of sowing and reaping are a reminder that harvest is sometimes a season away. Sometimes people expect to sow sin for years, but to immediately reap in steadfast love or mercy after sowing righteousness for just one day. If a Christian sticks with sowing in righteousness, they will reap in steadfast love in due time.

Because you have trusted in your power and in the multitude of your warriors. This is the essence of all sin. People trust in their own way instead of in God's way. Ruin always comes when people trust in their own way instead of God's way, and that ruin was about to come upon Israel. Whether the battle be against a stronger army, spiritual warfare or simply against personal sin, the message is to trust in God who will always lead the way to victory for those who are faithful to him: *<<When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots, an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt>>* (Deuteronomy 20:1).

As Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle. Shalman is an otherwise unknown name but may refer to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), who besieged Samaria from 725-723 BC.

King Jehu of Israel appears in Assyrian records describing an event that must have taken place shortly after his accession to the throne, during the western campaign of Shalmaneser III's eighteenth year (841 BC). During that campaign King Shalmaneser besieged Damascus, marched on to the Hauran Mountains in southern Syria, then through Gilead to the south of the Sea of Galilee and through Jezreel to Ba'li-ra'si, which is perhaps Mount Carmel, near Tyre. Verses 13-14 may preserve a memory of this march through northern Palestine, since Shalman there is probably an abbreviated form of Shalmaneser's name. At this time, Shalmaneser collected tribute from 'Jehu the Israelite' as well as from Tyre and Sidon.

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), found at the site of Nimrud, depicts the Israelite king Jehu giving tribute. Jehu, or perhaps his emissary, lies prostrate before the king while other Israelites present tribute that includes gold and silver objects. If the figure is Jehu, then it is the only extant pictorial representation of an Israelite king from antiquity. Shalmaneser III, after having received tribute from Jehu, also plundered Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. In commemoration of this successful campaign, Shalmaneser had his portrait carved on the cliffs of the Dog River, north of Beirut.

The location of Beth-arbel is unknown. The violence described suits Assyrian barbarity, and the degree of punishment is equal to the size of the offenses.