



Hosea - Chapter Twelve

- II. Hosea 4:1-14:9 - Hosea Spells Out His Parable with Accusations, Warnings, and Promises (continues)
- II.i. Hosea 11:1-12:1 - God's Compassion Despite Israel's Ingratitude (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twelve

Hosea recounts incidents from Israel's past in order to display the Lord's enduring kindness and Israel's stubborn ingratitude.

- ¹ Ephraim herds the wind,
and pursues the east wind all day long;
they multiply falsehood and violence;
they make a treaty with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

Hosea 12:1

Ephraim herds the wind. The idols and foreign alliances Israel trusts in are useless. They are like trying to feed on the wind, which will lead to destruction: <<*When it is transplanted, will it thrive? When the east wind strikes it, will it not utterly wither, wither on the bed where it grew?*>> (Ezekiel 17:10). Ephraim depends on what is elusive and unprofitable; wind is used elsewhere as an image this way: <<*Do you think that you can reprove words, as if the speech of the desperate were wind?*>> (Job 6:26), <<*He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again*>> (Psalm 78:39), <<*I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:14), and: <<*You shall winnow them and the wind*

shall carry them away, and the tempest shall scatter them. Then you shall rejoice in the Lord; in the Holy One of Israel you shall glory>> (Isaiah 41:16). Wind graphically describes the duplicity of both Israel and Judah's covenant making. Jesus uses the analogy of wind to portray the mysteries of the Spirit: <<*What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*'>> (John 3:6-8).

They make a treaty with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt. Instead of trusting in the Lord, Israel trusted in deals and payoffs to the surrounding superpowers. It was foolish for them to think that Assyria or Egypt was more powerful or dependable than the Lord was. Oil to Egypt could refer to an inducement offered to Egypt for relief when Israel was paying tribute to Assyria.

II.j. Hosea 12:2-14 - The Long History of Rebellion

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- ² The Lord has an indictment against Judah,
and will punish Jacob according to his ways,
and repay him according to his deeds.
- ³ In the womb he tried to supplant his brother,
and in his manhood he strove with God.
- ⁴ He strove with the angel and prevailed,
he wept and sought his favour;
he met him at Bethel,
and there he spoke with him.

Hosea 12:2-4

The references are to events in Jacob's life where he excelled. He tried to supplant his brother refers to the birth of Jacob when he took his brother Esau by the heel at birth (Genesis 25:26). In ancient Israel, a 'heel-catcher' was a double-dealer, someone who achieved their goals through crafty and dishonest means. Through Hosea, God says, "That was Jacob then and it is Israel now."

He strove with the angel and prevailed at Peniel refers to the night Jacob spent alone by the Jabbok River, returning to his homeland. There he wrestled with God who touched Jacob's hip socket and put it out of joint. That divine wounding of

Jacob made him into a new man, Israel (Genesis 32:24-31). Jacob refused to submit to God, so God demanded submission from him in a literal wrestling match. Jacob wrestled with the Lord God, who appeared in human form as a man. Since this was a unique messenger from heaven, he is also appropriately described as an angel of the Lord.

He wept and sought his favour. Why is it important to know that Jacob wept? Because it helps the reader understand how desperate and broken he was as he hung on to the Lord, now pleading only for a blessing.

Jacob met God at Bethel when he complied with God's command, and God reassured Jacob of his former promises; refer to Genesis 35:9-15.

- 5 The Lord the God of hosts,
the Lord is his name!
- 6 But as for you, return to your God,
hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God.
- 7 A trader, in whose hands are false balances,
he loves to oppress.
- 8 Ephraim has said, 'Ah, I am rich,
I have gained wealth for myself;
in all of my gain
no offence has been found in me
that would be sin.'

Hosea 12:5-8

The Lord the God of hosts. The specific mention of the Lord by his fuller name is joined with the prevailing of Jacob. The prophet once again calls his people to their divine calling and election, ratified by promises to the patriarchs; refer to the comments made on Hosea 2:8 and Romans 9:10-13.

But as for you, return to your God. Jacob came to the place where he knew God had beaten him, and all he could do was cling on to God and plead for a blessing: <<*If you return, O Israel, says the Lord, if you return to me, if you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives!' in truth, in justice, and in uprightness, then nations shall be blessed by him, and by him they shall boast*>> (Jeremiah 4:1-2), and: <<*Yet*

even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning>> (Joel 2:12). But as for you speaks to Israel, saying they should return to God the same way.

God's election was the origin of Israel's calling and the very reason that Israel can now be restored: by grace, Israel can return and exhibit the qualities of love and justice. However, Israel's deeds and words show they refuse to hold fast and wait continually for their God.

A trader, in whose hands are false balances. Their cruel and deceptive business practices oppress while they think of themselves as innocent. God commands fair commerce at all times and between all people: <<*You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt*>> (Leviticus 19:36), <<*Honest balances and scales are the Lord's; all the weights in the bag are his work*>> (Proverbs 16:11), <<*You shall have honest balances, an honest ephah, and an honest bath*>> (Ezekiel 45:10), and: <<*Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?*>> (Micah 6:11).

I have gained wealth for myself. Hosea prophesied during a time of great prosperity, but spiritual and moral decadence in Israel. When things are good financially, it is hard for people to believe that their society is in trouble - no offence has been found in me that would be sin.

Successful people have a tendency to claim they have become wealthy solely through their own endeavours, forgetting that what they have comes from God. The NT provides a warning to such people: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10), and: <<*Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*>> (James 4:13-14).

⁹ I am the Lord your God
from the land of Egypt;
I will make you live in tents again,
as on the days of the appointed festival.

Hosea 12:9

I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt. This is the strongest possible reminder that God can give to his people. However, he had been the God of their ancestors long before they even went into Egypt. He has always and will always be

God: <<'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty>> (Revelation 1:8).

I will make you live in tents again, as on the days of the appointed festival.

Although Israel enjoyed financial prosperity and fine homes, God's judgement would bring them into exile and humble tents again. This judgement is certain because God has spoken by the prophets, yet they did not listen. Eventually, the warnings stopped: <<*Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them*>> (Micah 3:6). Those returning from Babylonian exile did indeed live in temporary shelters and it was for them a source of great joy for it reminded them of how it had been in the days of their ancestors and how good it feels to be so reliant on God for everything: <<*And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them; for from the days of Jeshua son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing*>> (Nehemiah 8:17).

¹⁰ I spoke to the prophets;
it was I who multiplied visions,
and through the prophets I will bring destruction.

¹¹ In Gilead there is iniquity,
they shall surely come to nothing.
In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls,
so their altars shall be like stone heaps
on the furrows of the field.

Hosea 12:10-11

I spoke to the prophets. God spoke continuously through his anointed prophets, both to warn the people and to seek their repentance: <<*Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets*>> (Amos 3:7).

It was I who multiplied visions. The revelations granted to the Lord's people by the ministry of the Lord's prophets were special and numerous: <<*See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!'*>> (Deuteronomy 4:5-6), and: <<*He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has*

not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances. Praise the Lord!>> (Psalm 147:19-20). The visions and parables given to the prophets indicate the normal means that God uses to reveal truths to the prophets: <<*And he said, 'Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams'*>> (Numbers 12:6).

So their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field. Pagan altars were built high and stately to add dignity to the pagan god. When God's judgement comes, all those altars will be brought low, so the only altars will be the hills made by the furrows of the field.

- ¹² Jacob fled to the land of Aram;
there Israel served for a wife,
and for a wife he guarded sheep.
- ¹³ By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt,
and by a prophet he was guarded.
- ¹⁴ Ephraim has given bitter offence,
so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him
and pay him back for his insults.

Hosea 12:12-14

Jacob fled to the land of Aram. The mention again of Jacob emphasises God's grace in preserving his fugitive so that he would father the twelve tribes of Israel. Aram is Paddan-Aram in modern-day Syria, where Isaac sent Jacob; refer to Genesis 28:1-5. The previous passage brought up the impending exile of Israel, and now Hosea makes a connection between the coming exile of Israel and the 'exile' of Jacob when he fled from Esau to his uncle Laban in Paddan-Aram.

There Israel served for a wife. For a time the people of Israel lived as they should in their relationship with God but they were soon drawn into adultery with the various pagan religions that attracted them.

By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt. The prophet was Moses, who led the nation out of Egypt: <<*Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face*>> (Deuteronomy 34:10). In the face of God's gracious deliverance and preservation of his people, Ephraim has given bitter offence, so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him and pay him back for his insults: <<*Afterwards he shall turn to the coastlands, and shall capture many. But a commander shall put an end to his insolence; indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him*>> (Daniel 11:18).