



Hosea - Chapter Seven

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

II.d Hosea 6:4-7:10 - Impenitence of Israel and Judah (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Seven

Israel thinks the Lord has forgotten their wickedness. Israel's heart is inflamed after idols, like the heat in a baker's oven yet they are only a half-baked cake. Israel has mixed itself with other peoples. Israel is like a silly dove, calling to Egypt yet flying to Assyria.

6:11b When I would restore the fortunes of my people,
1 when I would heal Israel,
the corruption of Ephraim is revealed,
and the wicked deeds of Samaria;
for they deal falsely,
the thief breaks in,
and the bandits raid outside.

Hosea 6:11b-7:1

When I would restore the fortunes of my people. When the people of God came back into the land after the Babylonian exile, they mainly settled in the area of Judah. The harvest of returned exiles was mainly for Judah, not for Israel: <<*Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people – may their*

God be with them! – are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill-offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem>> (Ezra 1:2-4).

When I would heal Israel. God was willing to heal Israel from their sin and its effects, but not as long as they acted as if God did not see their sin. They had to treat God as he really is, a God who sees and remembers unrepentant, uncovered sin. Similar motifs link this chapter with the previous chapters (5:13 and v.1; 6:8 and v.1; 6:9 and v.11; 5:15 and v.2). It is the Lord's generosity, not his threats, that weighs heavy.

The wicked deeds of Samaria. Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom and the location for one of their golden calves where they would worship. It is symbolic of the sin of the whole people of Israel and therefore seen as being at the heart of the problem: *<<Yet, when I cleansed you in your filthy lewdness, you did not become clean from your filth; you shall not again be cleansed until I have satisfied my fury upon you>> (Ezekiel 24:13).*

² But they do not consider
that I remember all their wickedness.
Now their deeds surround them,
they are before my face.

³ By their wickedness they make the king glad,
and the officials by their treachery.

Hosea 7:2-3

But they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness. The problem among the people and leaders of Israel was they forgot, wilfully, that the Lord saw and remembered their sin: *<<Thus says the Lord concerning this people: Truly they have loved to wander, they have not restrained their feet; therefore the Lord does not accept them, now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins>> (Jeremiah 14:10).* People often deliberately forget that the Lord sees and remembers when their sin. It may be secret before men, but not before God, he says they are before my face. The same principles apply to the church today. Have they forgotten? Do they think God does not see? Do they think God is blind to their adultery or pre-marital sex? Do they think their pornography habit goes unnoticed? Do they think God's eyes are closed when they get drunk or take drugs? There are many church-going people today who think that God forgets or never sees such things, because they do them and then they come to church and make a profession of godliness, pretending that those things are never part of their life.

This was an accusation that Elihu levelled against Job: <<How much less when you say that you do not see him, that the case is before him, and you are waiting for him! And now, because his anger does not punish, and he does not greatly heed transgression, Job opens his mouth in empty talk, he multiplies words without knowledge'>> (Job 35:14-16).

There is a precious promise for those who come to God under the New Covenant: <<for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more>> (Jeremiah 31:34b). People often wish that time would make God forget their sin, but it does not. Only the atoning substitute of Jesus, crucified in their place under the New Covenant makes God forget repented sin. David knew what it was like to be forgiven of his guilt and shame: <<Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit>> (Psalm 32:1-2 NIV).

The actions described in Chapter 7 illustrate that any sign of remorse for Israel's guilt is completely absent. By their wickedness they make the king glad describes pleasing royalty, perhaps by assassinating potential rivals. Since there were four kings violently overthrown during Hosea's ministry, it's hard to pin down which one he may be referring to.

- 4 They are all adulterers;
they are like a heated oven,
whose baker does not need to stir the fire,
from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.
- 5 On the day of our king the officials
became sick with the heat of wine;
he stretched out his hand with mockers.
- 6 For they are kindled like an oven, their heart burns within them;
all night their anger smoulders;
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.
- 7 All of them are hot as an oven,
and they devour their rulers.
All their kings have fallen;
none of them calls upon me.

Hosea 7:4-7

The word oven, Hebrew *tannur*, repeated three times in these verses, can designate either a fixed or portable structure. This oven is made of earthenware and is used especially for baking bread. Israel was inflamed with desire and passion after idols like the coals of a freshly stoked fire, ready to bake bread. Paul used the same image of burning lust: *<<But if they are not practising self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion>>* (1 Corinthians 7:9).

The comparisons of adulterers with an oven are both progressive and overlapping. In v.4, the heated oven represents a quiet passion that does not go out even though the baker ceases to stir the fire. In v.6, the oven is a suppressed passion, like anger smouldering, that unexpectedly and violently erupts; it blazes like a flaming fire. In v.7 the oven depicts a consuming passion that will devour rulers and all their kings. Many relate this to the political intrigue that marked Ephraim's final hours. Four of the last six kings of Israel were assassinated.

None of them calls upon God: *<<Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?>>* (Psalm 14:4), *<<The people did not turn to him who struck them, or seek the Lord of hosts>>* (Isaiah 9:13), and: *<<those who have turned back from following the Lord, who have not sought the Lord or inquired of him>>* (Zephaniah 1:6). Here is a close association between an unquenchable zeal for political control and unbridled lust. Israel could not be hot, like an oven after idols and also call upon the Lord. They did in fact continue to sacrifice to the Lord: *<<With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord>>* (Hosea 5:6a), but it was empty ceremony, not a true calling upon the Lord.

⁸ Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.

Hosea 7:8

Difficulties with foreign politics inevitably followed these civil internal upheavals. Mixes himself with the peoples. Mixes, Hebrew *Balal*, is associated with blending ingredients in cooking and links with the baker in v.4. It is used in: *<<When you present a grain-offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil>>* (Leviticus 2:4). Israel's apostasy has made it indistinguishable from the pagan nations around them because they had mixed with them culturally: *<<They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did>>* (Psalm 106:34-35).

A cake not turned is one that is half-baked, and is not fit for eating. Some cakes probably included honey and the juice of grapes and figs, and had to be turned

while baking. Bread was often prepared as a cake that was cooked on both sides, something like a pancake. In thinking they can serve both the Lord and idols, Israel is like an unturned pancake, burned on one side, uncooked on the other.

⁹ Foreigners devour his strength,
but he does not know it;
grey hairs are sprinkled upon him,
but he does not know it.

Hosea 7:9

Foreigners devour his strength, but he does not know it. Israel is unaware of being manipulated by foreigners' politics. Man has an amazing ability to deceive himself when he is in sin. The prophet hits the nail on the head: <<***The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse – who can understand it?***>> (Jeremiah 17:9). Considering how easily people deceive themselves, and how their sin can be apparent to everyone but them, Israel's condition is not unusual:

- Burned and ruined, but he does not know it.
- Strength devoured, but he does not know it.
- Aging and weakening, but he does not know it.
- Pride testifies against him, but he does not know it.

It was said of Samson after Delilah cut his hair: <<But he did not know that the Lord had left him>> (Judges 16:20b). This is where the people of Israel were and some supposed followers of God today are. They are far from God and already suffering the effects, but they cannot see it.

Grey hairs are sprinkled upon him. The nation is like a man who has suddenly grown older and weaker but does not yet realise it. The grey hairs are perhaps like mould on food.

¹⁰ Israel's pride testifies against him;
yet they do not return to the Lord their God,
or seek him, for all this.

Hosea 7:10

They do not return to the Lord their God, or seek him. This explains the conundrum as to why Israel will be devastated despite the Lord's promises of good: <<***Israel has spurned the good; the enemy shall pursue him***>> (Hosea 8:3).

II.e Hosea 7:11-16 - Futile Reliance on the Nations

Having compared Israel to an oven (vv.4-7), and a half-baked cake (vv.8-10) thus describing their passion for evil, Hosea now goes on to describe them as a silly dove (vv.11-12), and a treacherous bow (vv.13-16), revealing their foolishness and their uselessness.

¹¹ Ephraim has become like a dove,
silly and without sense;
they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria.

¹² As they go, I will cast my net over them;
I will bring them down like birds of the air;
I will discipline them according to the report made to their assembly.

Hosea 7:11-12

Ephraim has become like a dove. Hosea piles image upon image. Now Israel is like a bird fluttering about, confused and without direction. The dove, usually noted for admirable qualities: <<*They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord*>> (Hosea 11:11), here is described as fickle. This probably refers to Israel's oscillating between Egypt and Assyria: <<*What then do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria, to drink the waters of the Euphrates?*>> (Jeremiah 2:18), <<*We have made a pact with Egypt and Assyria, to get enough bread*>> (Lamentations 5:6), and: <<*They shall not remain in the land of the Lord; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food*>> (Hosea 9:3). It describes the subterfuge of making secret alliances with two opposing powers at the same time as a guarantee of security. They think they can escape God by running to other nations, but the Lord says I will cast my net over them: <<*Thus says the Lord God: In an assembly of many peoples I will throw my net over you; and I will haul you up in my dragnet*>> (Ezekiel 32:3).

I will bring them down like birds of the air is the first of three pronouncements of judgement; the other two are revealed in v.13 and v.16.

I will discipline them according to the report made to their assembly. Israel's guilt is increased according to what they have heard. Greater knowledge means great accountability. As Jesus said: <<*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded*>> (Luke 12:48b).

- 13 Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!
Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me!
I would redeem them,
but they speak lies against me.
- 14 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.
- 15 It was I who trained and strengthened their arms,
yet they plot evil against me.

Hosea 7:13-15

Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Israel alone is to blame for the coming destruction for they have departed from the ways of God and gone after the ways of the world. They had wandered off and lost the protection of their shepherd: <<*You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them*>> (Ezekiel 34:4-6).

I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me. God desires to be reconciled to his people: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9), but they must be honest with themselves as to who God is and then proclaim the truth about him to others. To lie about the Lord is to bear false witness against him and is fundamentally against his commandments: <<*You shall not bear false witness*>> (Exodus 20:16a).

They gash themselves was probably as a means of invoking Baal: <<*Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them*>> (1 Kings 18:28).

It was I who trained and strengthened their arms. The people had forgotten or, more likely, had chosen to forget, that they had been raised up by God who had supplied all they had and had made them into a nation. Here, God reminds them once again that they owe him everything: <<*She did not know that it was I who*

gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal>> (Hosea 2:8), and: <<Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them>> (Hosea 11:3).

- ¹⁶ They turn to that which does not profit;
they have become like a defective bow;
their officials shall fall by the sword
because of the rage of their tongue.
So much for their babbling in the land of Egypt.

Hosea 7:16

They turn to that which does not profit. The people were often drawn to idol worship or the ways of the world because it seems to offer excitement. However, idols have nothing to offer that will bring benefit to a person's earthly life and only leads to one destination in the life yet to come.

They have become like a defective bow. Hosea adds another image, of a faulty bow that will not shoot an arrow straight. Everything that comes from Israel misses the mark. They are like a useless and dangerous weapon: *<<Yet they tested the Most High God, and rebelled against him. They did not observe his decrees, but turned away and were faithless like their ancestors; they twisted like a treacherous bow>> (Psalm 78:56-57).*

Their officials shall fall by the sword. The kings and priests were mostly killed when the Assyrians waged war on the northern kingdom, leaving the people leaderless, for they had forsaken God.

Egypt here is a symbolic name for all foreign powers, and is intended as a metaphorical reference to Israel's bondage in Egypt prior to the exodus, rather than a literal reference to a new deportation to Egypt. Like other historical references in Hosea, this name bemoans the reversal of Israel's fortunes. The humiliation and degradation of being taken into captivity is depicted on numerous reliefs from the ancient Near East: *<<Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, "Where is their God?"'>> (Joel 2:17).*