



Hosea - Chapter Nine

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

Summary of Chapter Nine

God will punish Israel by sending her people away from the land, to a place where they will not be able to make sacrifices to the Lord. Hosea then uses the first of four more comparisons to describe Israel as grapes in the wilderness (vv.10-17). The remaining three comparisons come in Hosea 10:1-11:11.

II.g. Hosea 9:1-17 - Punishment for Israel's Sin

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- ¹ Do not rejoice, O Israel!
Do not exult as other nations do;
for you have played the whore, departing from your God.
You have loved a prostitute's pay
on all threshing-floors.
- ² Threshing-floor and wine vat shall not feed them,
and the new wine shall fail them.

Hosea 9:1-2

Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult as other nations do. At the time Hosea brought this prophecy, things perhaps were not so bad in Israel. Maybe there was plenty of fun and good times among the people. However, they should not rejoice like other nations, because judgement was on the way: <<*On that day the Lord God of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and putting on*

sackcloth; but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'>> (Isaiah 22:12-13).

A prostitute's pay are scorned by the Lord: <<You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God>> (Deuteronomy 23:18). That which was believed to be the due payment was destroyed: <<I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my pay, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the wild animals shall devour them>> (Hosea 2:12).

On all threshing-floors. Israel practiced idolatry on the threshing floor, a place where grain was processed. They worshipped idols here because they believed that it helped the harvest. Because of their idolatry, the Lord would curse their harvest, and the threshing floor and the wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them: <<The fields are devastated, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails>> (Joel 1:10).

- ³ 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

They shall not remain in the land of the Lord. Not only would God curse their grain and grape harvest, he would also cast them out of the land in exile to both Egypt and Assyria. In the lands of exile there would be no bread or food for sacrifice to the Lord, only for survival, i.e. <<their bread shall be for their hunger only>> (v.4). This is bread that will not satisfy: <<He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord>> (Deuteronomy 8:3), and: <<Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food>> (Isaiah 55:2).

The failure of crops in the land is not the only outcome of Ephraim's adultery. Expulsion is another consequence. The mention of exile to Egypt and Assyria reflects the oscillating politics of Israel, trying to play the two against each other: <<Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria>> (Hosea 7:11).

- 4 They shall not pour drink-offerings of wine to the Lord,
and their sacrifices shall not please him.
Such sacrifices shall be like mourners' bread;
all who eat of it shall be defiled;
for their bread shall be for their hunger only;
it shall not come to the house of the Lord.

Hosea 9:4

Their sacrifices shall not please him. Such sacrifices shall be like mourners' bread is a description of conditions in exile. Because the food is unclean (v.3), they shall be defiled and therefore not acceptable in God's presence: <<*Then Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?' The priests answered, 'Yes, it becomes unclean.'* Haggai then said, *So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says the Lord; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean*>> (Haggai 2:13-14).

- 5 What will you do on the day of appointed festival,
and on the day of the festival of the Lord?
- 6 For even if they escape destruction,
Egypt shall gather them,
Memphis shall bury them.
Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver;
thorns shall be in their tents.

Hosea 9:5-6

What will you do on the day of appointed festival, and on the day of the festival of the Lord? Israel did not honour the Lord in their appointed festival days, so they Lord will have them taken them away. In their lands of exile, they will no longer be able to honour the festivals of the Lord. What will they do then: <<*What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth*>> (Isaiah 10:3), and: <<*the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule as the prophets direct; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?*>> (Jeremiah 5:31).

For even if they escape destruction is an indication that they think they will be safe. Their hope is quickly dashed, however: but Egypt shall gather them. Other disasters are described in the rest of the verse.

7 The days of punishment have come,
the days of recompense have come;
Israel cries,
'The prophet is a fool,
the man of the spirit is mad!'
Because of your great iniquity,
your hostility is great.

Hosea 9:7

The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come. There was a time of warning and now the time has come for the time of judgement: <<*What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?*>> (Job 31:14 NIV), <<*For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head*>> (Obadiah 15), <<*The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of their sentinels, of their punishment, has come; now their confusion is at hand*>> (Micah 7:4), and: <<*Then those in Judæa must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written*>> (Luke 21:21-22).

Some understand the prophet is a fool as Hosea's quotation of Israel's earlier ridicule of the prophet, God's sentinel (v.8), i.e. that Ephraim's rejection of God's messenger causes them to entrap themselves. By this interpretation, the last two lines would be Hosea's response, showing why the prophets have been prophesying such disaster. Others understand this as Hosea's own statement. By this interpretation, Hosea then says, in the last two lines, that the people's great iniquity shows the reason why these prophets' predictions have been so foolish; they were not heeded therefore they had wasted their time and effort.

8 The prophet is a sentinel for my God over Ephraim,
yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways,
and hostility in the house of his God.

Hosea 9:8

The prophet is a sentinel for my God. Just as watchmen were set to keep guard and warn of an approaching enemy, so God raised up prophets whose role it was to warn the people to change their ways and return to God or face the consequences of their actions: <<*Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me*>> (Ezekiel 3:17). It is a role with great responsibility: <<*O Mortal, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one of their number as their sentinel; and if the sentinel sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people; then if any who hear the sound of the trumpet do not take warning, and the sword comes and takes them away, their blood shall be upon their own heads. They heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; their blood shall be upon themselves. But if they had taken warning, they would have saved their lives. But if the sentinel sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any of them, they are taken away in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at the sentinel's hand*>> (Ezekiel 33:2-7).

- ⁹ They have deeply corrupted themselves
as in the days of Gibeah;
he will remember their iniquity,
he will punish their sins.

Hosea 9:9

They have deeply corrupted themselves. There is no doubt where the blame lies. The people, misguided by their leaders though they were, are responsible for their failure to turn back to God's ways when called upon to do so. A similar complaint is made against Judah in later years, with a similar outcome: <<*I said, 'Surely the city will fear me, it will accept correction; it will not lose sight of all that I have brought upon it.'* But they were the more eager to make all their deeds corrupt>> (Zephaniah 3:7).

As in the days of Gibeah refers to the events in Judges Chapters 19-21, where God brings judgement on Gibeah and the tribe of Benjamin for their cruel violence: <<*Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah?*>> (Hosea 10:9).

He will remember their iniquity, he will punish their sins. This had to be the case for this was before the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross: <<*And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in*

their hearts, and I will write them on their minds', he also adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more'>> (Hebrews 10:15-17).

¹⁰ Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree,
in its first season,
I saw your ancestors.
But they came to Baal-peor,
and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame,
and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Hosea 9:10

Like grapes in the wilderness; like the first fruit on the fig tree. The unexpected discovery of grapes in the desert or the first figs of the season is absolutely delightful (v.13). God fondly remembers the days when Israel was faithful and fruitful unto him. There was a time when Israel was something special to God, as if one found luscious grapes in the wilderness.

Israel is often expressed as God's vineyard and he expected good fruit from his careful nurturing. The reality was somewhat different: <<What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?>> (Isaiah 5:4).

I saw your ancestors shows this is another reference to the nation's early history. However, just like Hosea's marriage, that cherished relationship had a surprisingly short lifespan.

They came to Baal-peor. Idolatry and whoredom have also gone hand in hand from Israel's very beginning. Israel's sin and idolatry in the days of Hosea is like their sin at Baal Peor in Numbers Chapter 25, associated with sexual immorality and idolatry: <<*Then they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead*>> (Psalm 106:28).

Thus Israel became detestable like the thing they loved. Israel loved their disgraceful idols, and they have become like them. People will become like the god they love and serve, whether it is the Lord: <<*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is*>> (1 John 3:2), or like an abomination.

11 Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird —
no birth, no pregnancy, no conception!

12 Even if they bring up children,
I will bereave them until no one is left.
Woe to them indeed
when I depart from them!

Hosea 9:11-12

Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird. Israel's glory was seen for they were the chosen people of God. Yet that glory departed from them because of their choice to leave the ways of the Lord. However, their true glory is yet to be revealed: <<*Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'*>> (Luke 2:28-32).

Woe to them indeed when I depart from them. When Israel spurns God's grace, they are left to their own devices. Judgement is dramatic, for there will be no birth, no pregnancy, not even conception. If the nation does not change, it will soon head towards extinction.

13 Once I saw Ephraim as a young palm planted in a lovely meadow,
but now Ephraim must lead out his children for slaughter.

14 Give them, O Lord —
what will you give?
Give them a miscarrying womb
and dry breasts.

Hosea 9:13-14

Once I saw Ephraim as a young palm planted in a lovely meadow is a reference to the nation being established in the Promised Land. In those days they followed the ways of the Lord and profited from doing so.

But now Ephraim must lead out his children for slaughter. Although many in the nation would be taken into captivity, many would perish in the battles that would be fought to defend their land against Assyria before defeat became inevitable. This would be the same scenario in Jerusalem when the Babylonians came: <<*You*

invited my enemies from all around as if for a day of festival; and on the day of the anger of the Lord no one escaped or survived; those whom I bore and reared my enemy has destroyed>> (Lamentations 2:22).

Give them, O Lord – what will you give? The idea is that Hosea began an angry prayer against the people - Give them, O Lord - then he stopped because he checked his heart and did not know what to pray, i.e. what will you give? In the end, he asked for a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. Really, Hosea prayed for mercy. Knowing the coming judgement, he prayed “Lord, give them few children so those children will not have to face the horrors of your coming judgement.”

Sometimes those who see themselves, perhaps accurately, as more spiritual and closer to God than others in a church or group get angry and frustrated with those who do not seem to have hearts burning for the Lord. Their frustration is understandable but the pause in Hosea’s prayer should give them pause. It is a good thing to long for revival and spiritual passion among God’s people, but if that makes Christians proud, angry, or bitter against others then Satan has won a great victory.

A miscarrying womb and dry breasts would be the opposite of the fruitfulness the people sought in Baal worship. In the culture of the day barrenness was seen as a curse or at least a personal disgrace for a woman yet in times of great distress such as this Jesus says it is a blessing: <<*For the days are surely coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed”*>> (Luke 23:29).

¹⁵ Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal;
there I came to hate them.
Because of the wickedness of their deeds
I will drive them out of my house.
I will love them no more;
all their officials are rebels.

Hosea 9:15

Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal; there I came to hate them. As mentioned before in Hosea 4:15, God despised the city of Gilgal as a centre of idolatry in Israel. At one time, Gilgal was a place where prophets were trained under Elijah and Elisha; refer to 2 Kings 2:1 and 4:38. However, in Hosea’s day, it had become a centre of false worship; refer to Hosea 4:15 and 12:11; and Amos 4:4 and 5:5.

I will drive them out of my house. In this sense, exile was the perfect punishment for Israel. They had disgraced God’s house, his land, so he would ‘evict’ them.

16 Ephraim is stricken,
their root is dried up,
they shall bear no fruit.
Even though they give birth,
I will kill the cherished offspring of their womb.

17 Because they have not listened to him,
my God will reject them;
they shall become wanderers among the nations.

Hosea 9:16-17

Their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Again, as commented on at v.14, this punishment is the opposite of what they sought in worshipping the Baals. One of the major reasons Israel went after idols like Baal and Ashtoreth was because those gods were thought to bring fertility and fruitfulness. God reminds Israel that he is really the Lord over the womb, and that he will turn their fruitfulness into barrenness: <<*It will be paid in full before their time, and their branch will not be green*>> (Job 15:32), and: <<*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). There is only one way to remain fruitful: <<*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me*>> (John 15:4).

They have not listened to him. God's people put themselves at risk when they abandon dependency on the Lord and obedience to him.

They shall become wanderers among the nations. That is, they will be exiles. This is exactly what the Lord promised under the terms of the Old Covenant in Deuteronomy 30:24-28. Thankfully, believers can now come to God by faith in a new and better covenant, where he promises to remember their sins no more: <<*For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more*>> (Hebrews 8:12).