

Hosea Chapter 10

Verses 1-2: "Israel is an empty vine:" The word "empty" (Hebrew *Bagag*), when used in intransitive constructions, means "to be poured out" or "spread abroad." Used with reference to a spreading or luxuriant vine, it pictures a vine whose running shoots bear abundant fruit. As God's vine (Isa. 5:1-7), Israel should have produced spiritual fruit.

The more prosperous Israel became with a "multitude of fruit, increased altars, and sacred pillars," the more they increased their idolatry and rejected the Lord. God accused them of being double-minded (1 Kings 18:21; Matt. 6:24).

Hosea 10:1 "Israel [is] an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images."

"Agricultural prosperity had resulted in spiritual corruption (Ezek. 16:10-19).

Israel is the vine spoken of here. Israel is like a vine that empties out all of its good fruit. We saw in the previous lesson, where God had cursed the womb, and they produced no children. We see the very thing here, when God removes His blessing from a people, their crops and fruit do not produce. These goodly images were probably, to Baal. They have left the worship of the One True God for false gods.

Hosea 10:2 "Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty: he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images."

"Their heart is divided": Either between God and their idols or between God and the world.

"Now shall they be found faulty": As this was their sin, so it is here threatened, that the effects thereof should prove and be an open manifestation of their guilt, so the effects hereof should manifestly prove them faulty.

"He": Either God, or the king of Assyria stirred up by God to invade and destroy Ephraim.

"Shall break down their altars": Utterly pull down those altars which they had multiplied to their idols. The Assyrians shall, as other conquering heathen idolaters, rage against the gods of the people they conquer, as well as against the people. Such was the pride and atheism of these men.

"He shall spoil their images": Waste or destroy them; how goodly they had seemed to be, yet they should be broken to pieces; and where made of rich materials, as silver and gold, or if adorned with it, the enemy should the sooner spoil them. And then it will appear how stupefied were these people to trust in them, or ascribe any praise to them, when Baal cannot defend his own images or people.

The following Scripture has a great deal to say about the person whose heart is divided.

1 Kings 18:21 "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD [be] God, follow him: but if Baal, [then] follow him. And the people answered him not a word."

God will not allow this. He wanted their total allegiance. He would not accept them worshipping Him and false gods at the same time.

Matthew 6:24 "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

We see from this, God requires 100% of our loyalty. He will destroy these false gods Himself.

Verses 3-4: The last 5 kings of Israel were usurpers. Impotent and unworthy of respect, they were incapable of enforcing the laws of the land.

Hosea 10:3 "For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us?"

These are the words of despair, not of repentance; of people terrified by the consciousness of guilt, but not coming forth out of its darkness; describing their condition, not confessing the iniquity which brought it on them. In sin, all Israel had asked for a king, when the Lord was their king. In sin, Ephraim had made Jeroboam king. In sin, their subsequent kings were made, without the counsel and advice of God; and now as the close of all, they reflect how fruitless it all was.

"Because we feared not the Lord": Worshipped not, kept not his law, depended not on God, therefore we have no king, or one next to none, not able to help us.

"What then should a king do to us?" And now if we had our king, were he as powerful, wise, and successful as Jeroboam the Second, yet it would be too late, the Assyrian power hath so far prevailed, and God is so far departed from us. Kings are not able to save without the God of kings.

The king that they had chosen for themselves, who was not appointed of God; and had no power at all to help them in their time of trouble. God had protected them from just such a problem, as long as they were obedient to Him. Now, they have placed their faith in others, and have no help at all. The fear of the LORD here, is speaking of the great respect that was due Him. It is really speaking of reverence.

Hosea 10:4 "They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field."

"They": The nobles and great men in Israel, the heads of the parties, or the counsellors of the kingdom.

“Have spoken words”: Have in long and repeated consultations and debates contrived and laid forth the designs most like to help us; but all in vain, all is but words. Or thus they have deceived one another, and ruined all; and this latter seems exactly to suit with what follows.

“Swearing falsely”: By perjury deceiving those they treated with, in making a covenant; either among themselves, accepting a usurper, promising and swearing loyalty to him; or with their allies, as with the Assyrian king, whose covenant they broke by perjury and contrary to oath, sent to and confederated with Sun, or So, king of Egypt.

“Judgment”: i.e. Divine revenges do so abound everywhere; or else unequal and sinful projects, counsels, and resolutions of their rulers. They are instead of just, wholesome and saving, turned into bitter, poisonous and pernicious as hemlock.

“As hemlock in the furrows of the field”: A proverbial speech expressing the greatness of this pernicious evil. So this will be explained by (Amos 6:12), oppression, injustice, and all sins spread (as hemlock quickly overruns a field), over the entire kingdom.

They had not kept their covenant with God. It appears; even their day to day life was full of deceit and lies. They made agreements; they had no intention of keeping. God had forbidden them to swear at all, but worse than that, they had sworn lies. "Hemlock" seems to be associated with bitter herbs. This is speaking of the chastisement of God that comes upon them for their lies. Instead of producing sweet edible food, their land is full of bitterness.

Verses 5-8: Jeroboam had set up the “calf of Beth-aven (Beth-el), as recorded (in 1 Kings 12:28-29). Aven is a derogatory name for the town of Beth-el (see note on 4:15-19). Hosea indicated the idol would be “carried to Assyria,” while the people and priests would “mourn” and “shriek.” Israel would also mourn the loss of their “king” and the destruction of their “high places.” If only the people of Israel had grieved their sin and their loss of God’s favor!

Hosea 10:5 "The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven: for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof [that] rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it."

“The calves of Beth-aven” (see notes on 4:15; 8:5).

Samaria was the capital of Israel. Beth-aven is speaking of house of vanity. The calves here are speaking of the calf that Jeroboam set up in the temple to worship. They had slipped into gross idolatry. This calf cannot help them in their time of trouble. The people shall mourn at the loss of the calf, and the priests will mourn with them. The people and the priests had accepted this calf to worship as their god. God allows it to be taken.

Hosea 10:6 "It shall be also carried unto Assyria [for] a present to king Jareb: Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel."

"The golden calf": (Hosea 6-8), "shall be carried into Assyria": It was the custom of the eastern people, and also of the Romans, to carry away the gods of the conquered countries. For a present to King Jareb (see note on Hosea 5:13). The king of Assyria is meant who's dependent and tributary the king of Israel now was.

"Ephraim shall receive shame": They shall be ashamed to find that the idol in which they trusted could not defend them or itself from being disgraced and taken away.

"Ephraim shall receive shame": For worshipping such an idol, when they shall see it broke to pieces, and the gold of it made a present to the Assyrian king, and that it could not save them, nor itself.

"And Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel": Of giving in to such idolatry, contrary to the counsel, mind, and will of God. Or of the counsel, which they and Jeroboam took to set up the calves at Dan and Beth-el; and thereby keep the people from going up to Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28). As well as of their counsel and covenant with the king of Egypt against the king of Assyria (2 Kings 17:4).

This is speaking of the calf being carried into Assyria and was given to the king. It had been proclaimed as god of Israel. This calf was helpless to itself, or to these people. The calf is an idol. The name "Jareb" means he will contend. It is probably a symbolic name for Assyria. The counselors were just as evil as the ones they gave counsel to. All of the counsel led to shame.

Hosea 10:7 "[As for] Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water."

After three years' siege she shall be cut off. Her king is cut off; for all the rest of the kingdom was lost, and now he is pent up there also. He that was once the confidence of the ten tribes, and king of a mighty people, is now spoiled of all but one city, where he is rather a prisoner than a king, kept close till made a captive.

"Is cut off": shortly will be cut off; it is not unlikely this prophecy should be delivered when Samaria was besieged.

"As the foam upon the water": As a contemptible, weak, and light thing: it is a proverb, and foretells how contemptibly the Assyrians should use them.

The foam on the water would be skimmed off and done away with. This is speaking of the king being of no use to his captors.

Hosea 10:8 "The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us."

"Cover us ... fall on us": The captivity would be so severe that the people would pray for the mountains and hills to fall on them, similar to the last days (Luke 23:30; Rev. 6:16).

The high places had been where much of the worship of the false gods took place. Now they will grow up with weeds. There will be no one to care for them. "Aven" here, is speaking of the Beth-aven we spoke of earlier. It had been Beth-el (house of God), but became a place where evil worship took place. The growing of the thorn and thistle show the lack of use. It was almost as if the altars themselves were ashamed. The battle would be so great, many would choose to die, rather than be captured.

Hosea 10:9 "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them."

For full details on the wicked town of "Gibeah" (see Judges Chapters 19 to 21), also the birthplace of Saul.

Israel had sinned greatly at Gibeah. The sin was the shameful thing they had done to the Levite's concubine. We mentioned this briefly in a previous lesson. This is as if God has never completely forgotten about the terrible sin committed there. He is explaining that what is going on here is just as bad, if not worse. Their punishment will surely come this time.

Hosea 10:10 "[It is] in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows."

"In their two furrows" refers to Israel's double sin of rejecting God both as God and as King.

Israel would receive a double portion of judgment for her multiplied iniquity (Isaiah 40:2; Jeremiah 16:18).

God's wrath has come up in His face, and His desire is to chastise them for their terrible sins. God is holy, and He expects His people to be holy also. Not anything, or anyone, can stop God from punishing them; now that He has judged them guilty. The two furrows could be speaking of the fact that God will punish Judah, as well as Israel. They may try to hide from God, but there is no hiding place He cannot find.

Hosea 10:11 "And Ephraim [is as] a heifer [that is] taught, [and] loveth to tread out [the corn]; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, [and] Jacob shall break his clods."

"A heifer that is taught and loveth to tread": This was a far easier work than plowing, since cattle were not bound together under a yoke, but tread on the grain singly and were free to eat some of it, as the law required that they be un-muzzled (Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:9).

The job of the heifer had been taught her. She was to tread out the corn. Ephraim had it better than his neighbors. Just as the heifer could eat the corn she treads and got really fat, Ephraim had been blessed abundantly. Ephraim had things so good, that she began to seek other gods. Ephraim is taken by Assyria, and put in bondage. It is as if a yoke has been placed on him and a rider makes him work. Judah will be captured by Babylon and caused to do hard work in bondage. "Jacob" speaks of all 12 tribes of Israel, Judah and Ephraim combined.

Hosea 10:12 "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for [it is] time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

Hosea urged Israel to "seek the Lord" by sowing "righteousness" (or justice), and reaping God's "mercy" (6:6). God's future gift of righteousness (2:19), would be so abundant that it would be as rain (6:3).

This is one more call for them to repent, before it is too late. Even now, God would rain righteousness upon them, if they would turn from their false gods, and spread the true righteousness of God. Whatever you sow, you reap. They must be spreading righteousness and mercy, if God is to hear and forgive them.

Hosea 10:13 "Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men."

"Ye have ploughed wickedness": Instead of working righteousness (verse 12), you have taken a great deal of pains in the service of sin, to compass your wicked designs.

"Ye have reaped iniquity": Ye have in return, received the fruit of iniquity, namely punishment or calamity.

"Ye have eaten the fruit of lies": Fed yourselves with vain hopes, which have deceived and will deceive you. Or, you have trusted to that which has been only deceptive, not really satisfying or profitable.

Because thou didst trust in thy way": i. e., not God's. They forsook God's way, and followed "ways of wickedness and misbelief." While displeasing God, they trusted in the worship of the calves and in the help of Egypt and Assyria, "making flesh their arm, and departing from the living God." So long as a man mistrusts his ways of sin, there is hope of his conversion amid any depths of sin. When "he trusts in his ways," all entrance is closed against the grace of God. He is as one dead; he not only justifies himself, but is self-justified. There is nothing in him, neither love nor fear, which can be awakened.

"And in the multitude of thy mighty men": Their valiant soldiers, their numerous armies, and the generals of them, well skilled in war, and courageous. Also in their auxiliaries, which they had from the Egyptians and others. These they put their confidences in, to protect them; also in their garrisons and fortresses.

They had placed their faith in false gods, they lived wicked lives. They dealt unfairly with the people around them. They had planted wickedly, and they would reap iniquity. They would lie, or cheat or steal, if it would benefit them. They had left Holy God to worship false gods with no morals. They were doing whatever was right in their own sight. They looked to the outward might of men, and not at their hearts. They were respecters of persons, because of their position in the community.

Hosea 10:14 "Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces upon [her] children."

The chapter ends with a grim description of the devastation that would come to the wayward people of God. The name "Shalman" may refer to Salamanu, a Moabite king who invaded Gilead (around 740 B.C.), or to Shalmaneser V, the Assyrian king who conquered Israel (in 722 B.C.), who played a role in Israel's demise (2 Kings 17:3-6). Although the location of Beth-arbel is uncertain, the memory of the heinous crimes committed there was vividly etched into their minds.

Even though this happened in battle, it was really a judgment of God against these people. This all happened because of their sins. The attack was against the fenced cities. We can see from the mother being dashed to pieces upon her children, just how cruel and inhuman this conflict was. This was possibly, the battle where Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, comes against Samaria three years. This was a very cruel time, when many died horrible deaths.

Hosea 10:15 "So shall Beth-el do unto you because of your great wickedness: in a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off."

"King" Hosea (ca. 732-722 B.C.).

Beth-el, which had been a place of God, had been turned into a place of calf worship. God's fury was kindled against them, because of this worship of a false god. The time this happened, was a time when it appeared they were gaining in prosperity. They were prosperous in the flesh, but their spiritual lives were greatly lacking. The king was cut off and helpless. It happened so suddenly, it seemed like a morning.

Hosea Chapter 10 Questions

1. What is Israel compared to in verse 1?
2. What happens to the people, when God removes His blessings?
3. What were the goodly images in verse 1 speaking of?
4. What are both of the above Scriptures saying to us?
5. Why could their king not help them?
6. What is the fear of the LORD in verse 3 speaking of?
7. They had not kept _____ with God.
8. What were their day to day lives full of?

9. What was "hemlock"?
10. Instead of producing sweet edible food, their land was full of _____.
11. Samaria was the capitol of _____.
12. Beth-aven was speaking of _____ of _____.
13. Who would mourn at the loss of the calf?
14. What happened to the calf?
15. The calf had been proclaimed as _____ of Israel.
16. What does the name "Jareb" mean?
17. It is probably a symbolic name for _____.
18. What happens to foam on water?
19. What were the high places used for?
20. What is "Aven" speaking of?
21. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of _____.
22. What was the terrible sin?
23. Why was it God's desire to chastise them?
24. What is Ephraim spoken of as in verse 11?
25. What does Jacob speak of in verse 11?
26. Sow to yourselves in _____.
27. What is verse 12?
28. Describe these evil people.
29. Even though the terrible punishment comes in battle, where is it really coming from?
30. What does the mother being dashed to pieces on her children show us?
31. The battle happened so suddenly, it seemed like a _____.